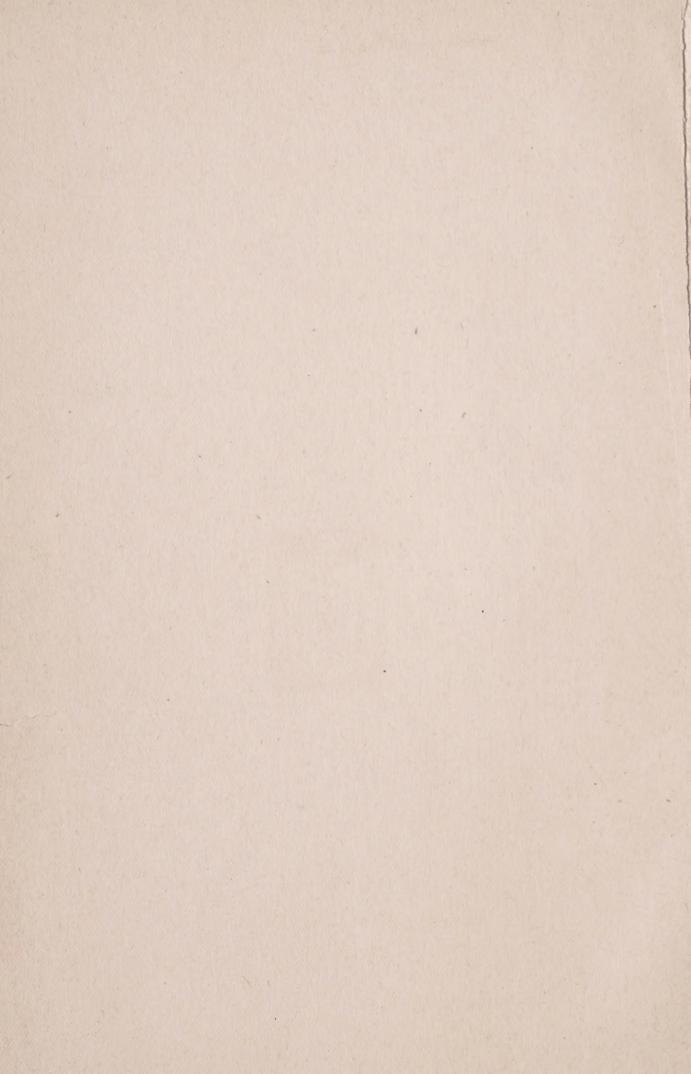


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BY

DONA TERESA DE SAVALLO

MARQUESA D'ALPENS

williamson, mrs. alice Muriel (Lingston)



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CHAPTER ONE

A MISSING ADVERTISEMENT

RANCES ELIOT and Dolores, her daughter, came back to Claridge's Hotel at five o'clock very tired, very hot, a little hungry, and a good deal discouraged. It was their third day of country house hunting.

With country houses, dozens of country houses, whirling through their brains, they sat down in a corner of the big hall, which was peacefully quiet in its August dullness, and Frances ordered tea.

"I'm getting so downhearted about it all, I could cry," said she, leaning back limply as she pulled off her gloves and folded them with mechanical neatness. No matter how tired she was, Frances Eliot was always methodical, always daintily neat. She would somehow have contrived not to look untidy in a high wind, if she had forgotten her veil. To-day she had been "on the go" (as she would have said) since half past eight, had changed trains five times, had examined four large houses from attic to cellar, had walked over acres of lawn and garden, had driven in open carriages along dusty roads under a blazing sun; yet her small-featured, ivory-pale face, her brown satin hair, and the brown hat and dress which matched it were as fresh, as spotless, as when she started out in the morning.

It was not so with Dolores, though Frances was forty and Dolores nineteen.

Dolores, named after a fair woman of Spain, where her English father had been born and spent his boyhood, was emotional, though shy of showing her emotions-half afraid of them, indeed. These old English houses which she had visited meant for her the poetry and historical romance of a great past. She was poignantly sorry for the people who were forced to let or sell their beautiful homes to strangers, for it did not occur to her that any of them could possibly part with such places of their own free will. She reconstructed their stories, and to her young mind all verged upon the tragic. Silently she suffered in the intensity of her sympathy. Each place she saw in turn she would have liked to take without parley, not always because she wished to live there, but because she could not endure the thought of disappointing the owners who had been so kind about showing their property, so wistfully anxious to dispose of it. She wanted them to have the money, which she felt they must be needing terribly.

This day had been harder than either of the other two, and Dolores was keyed to a highly nervous state, though she did not know that she was tired, and would have rushed off to look at another house if necessary. Usually she had a bright rose color, which came and went with her thoughts, as if somebody had been whispering compliments which no one else could hear, and her great brown eyes had the look of one who finds each moment of life an enchanting surprise. But now she was pale, and her white lids seemed weighted down by the long black lashes.

"I'm not a bit discouraged," she said. "I'm too excited. But I feel wicked to have disappointed those people. They did so want us to have their houses. If I were a queen I would

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have taken them all, or else sent anonymous presents of thousands of pounds to keep the estates up."

As this was an entirely unpractical suggestion, Frances was not interested. When Dolores's imagination soared to impossible heights, Frances attributed it to the fact that the girl's grandmother on the father's side had been Spanish. The dear little woman from a Western State of America (whose husband had married her because she was dovelike, and bullied her because she continued to be dovelike) smiled indulgently now at her daughter, and wished that tea would come. Waiting for it, she glanced round the hall, her eyes wandering until they focused with interest on a group in a far corner.

The party consisted of a man and two women, and Frances, though she was new to England and its ways except through tales told by her husband, felt instinctively that these three were different from other out-of-season visitors at the hotel. They were "grand people," she said to herself simply, not of the sort who usually came to town in August. The two ladies were quietly dressed, and with a certain native shrewdness Frances Eliot decided that they were even above the "smart" and frivolous set of whose doings she often read in novels with shocked interest.

"Do you see those people over there having tea, Lolita?" she murmured to her daughter. "Now, they're the kind of English people I want to get in with when we find our place in the country—the real kind, the best there is, like your father used to talk of when he told me about England."

Dolores naturally glanced first at the man. He was dark and handsome, with a fine and haughty profile, hair silvering at the temples, a black mustache, and a calm air of taking it for granted that nobody in the world could be superior to

himself in position. The girl thought him quite old—forty, at least—but she admired his clear outlines, his leanness and brownness, and his look of breeding; also being the romantic and imaginative young creature she was, the melancholy cast of his face, which probably meant no more than boredom, interested her at once.

"I wonder if he's married to one of those ladies?" she asked herself, "and if he is, to which?"

But, on a second glance at the woman, there could be no doubt that, if one were the wife of the "interesting man," as Dolores immediately named him, it must be the younger of the two, for the elder was assuredly his sister.

She, too, was "quite old" in the eyes of nineteen—thirty-five, perhaps; nevertheless, she was beautiful in a way which fascinated the girl, though it repelled rather than attracted her. The man's face and the woman's were cut on the same lines, and they had the same somber eyes where passion would be more at home than laughter, but Dolores liked the man better than the woman. "She looks wicked," the girl thought, half ashamed of the uncharitable comment, for she could not be happy in thinking evil of anyone, even a stranger. "I've seen pictures of Cleopatra with an expression like that."

But it was difficult to fancy Cleopatra in a pale gray voile dress of the latest fashion, and a toque of silver tulle.

As for the other woman, who could not be more than twenty-six or twenty-seven, she was not as striking or as handsome as the brother and sister, but she was equally distinguished in the same subtle way which the girl was too young and inexperienced to define; and already Dolores was able to judge that the blandness and the air of aloofness from an

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insignificant world were both of an unmistakably English type.

"You see what I mean about them, don't you?" asked Frances, when her daughter did not answer.

"Yes, I see what you mean," echoed Dolores.

"Can't you imagine our knowing people like that when we've got settled in some beautiful old house, just as good as any they could possibly have themselves?" Frances went on. "They'd come to call on us, and we'd return the call. Then they'd ask us to dinner to meet all the neighboring lords."

"Suppose there weren't any?" the girl asked absent-

mindedly.

"There would be. There always are in every county. Your father said so. The county people, you know. They call on newcomers, if they take a big house, and show that they're of importance. None of the houses we've seen so far seem important enough to me, or old enough."

"I think I should care a lot more about the house itself than about the neighbors," said Dolores.

"Why, yes, so would I, in a way," agreed her mother.

"But your father came of a good old family, you know, and he'd want us to get in with the right sort of people. It's always been my dream to live in such a house and such a neighborhood as those he used to describe. I often said it was a pity he never thought he had time to come over himself."

"He was busy making money for us, dear," Dolores reminded her.

"Yes, but he'd made enough long ago, long before he died. I guess it was partly because his own branch of the family had been estranged from the rich and grand branch, and he was too proud to introduce himself to relatives who'd thought

themselves above his parents. I feel just that way, too. If I should ever meet any of the right Eliots I don't believe I'd say one word about being related to them by marriage. But for your father's sake, I wouldn't mind their finding out that we were rich and living in one of the nicest places in England. It would be a kind of satisfaction. But thank goodness, here comes tea."

It was good tea, and Frances admired the gold spoons in the delicate saucers and the gold fork with which she was supposed to eat inviting-looking cakes. Also, she admired the gorgeous footman who brought the tray, and wondered if it would be considered appropriate in a country house to have powdered servants like that.

For some years her husband, Richard Eliot, had been rich, with money made by hard work in America, where he had arrived from England a poor young man with only enough dollars to allow of his landing on a foreign shore. But they had continued to live on a ranch in Colorado almost as simply as if they had been no better off than at the time of the rather imprudent marriage. An accomplished governess for Dolores had been one of the few luxuries which Richard Eliot had thought worth having. But Frances had wider ideas for the future. She had always wanted to travel, and especially to see England, where she felt, with a sense of mild importance, that her husband's ancestors had helped to make history. Richard had been dead for nearly two years now. Since then she and Dolores had seen Chicago and New York, and Frances had learned how to spend money.

It was pleasant to sit and sip their tea after the fatigue of the day, even though the day had been disappointing. They did not talk much for, though neither said as much to

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the other, the mother and daughter had become for the moment more interested in the people across the hall than they were in themselves. They did not stare, but they contrived to see all that the man and his two companions did.

The party had finished their tea, and were looking at some illustrated papers. Suddenly the man, who had appeared to be rather bored, waked to lively interest in something he was reading. He held the paper closer to his eyes, studying one of the pages, then let it fall on his knees, and sat still, staring in front of him, so absorbed in his own thoughts that he did not answer when his handsome sister questioned him. Again she spoke, and he seemed to come to himself with a slight start, as if he had fallen into a dream, and not a pleasant one. The younger of the two women addressed him. He answered with an air of impatience and got up, throwing the paper down on the sofa where he had been sitting. Promptly it slid off and fell on the floor, no one appearing to notice. The three talked together for a moment, and then the blonde young woman rose also, the elder remaining seated and shaking her head when her companion made some suggestion.

"I believe those two are married," thought Dolores as the pair walked away together. "They have the air of it—and of being a little bored with one another."

The remaining member of the party leaned back in her chair and turned over the leaves of a magazine until the others were out of sight. Then she instantly laid down the magazine and picked up the illustrated paper which her brother had (either by accident or design) let fall under the sofa.

The paragraph or picture which had interested him was on one of the first pages. Dolores and her mother had both no-

ticed that, and now they could not help seeing that the beautiful woman was searching for something. They did not say anything to each other, or even lift a significant eyebrow with a meeting glance, but neither had any doubt what that "something" was. She wanted to know what her brother had found which had surprised and displeased him so much that his mood had completely changed.

Presently she came upon the thing—it was easy for the Eliots to see that. She, too, gave a little start, or rather stiffened herself as if to bear a shock, bent closely over the paper, and gazed at it for a long time without moving or turning a page. At last she opened a little bag of gray suède and produced a pair of tiny gold-handled scissors. Then she cut a square bit from the paper, and having placed the slip and the scissors in the bag, she rose and went away.

"That was like a scene in a play without words," said Dolores.

"Yes. And I'm dying to know what it was in that paper they were so excited about," answered Frances. "What's more, I've just got to know. Do go over there, like a dear child, and get the paper."

Dolores hesitated. "It—seems so curious; so—almost mean—behind their backs," she said.

"Pooh!" retorted Frances. "They wouldn't care. We're of no more importance to them than the chairs we sit on. They looked over here, not at, but right through us several times. Besides, I am curious. If you won't get the paper, I'll go myself."

That settled it. Dolores sprang up and dutifully, though shamefacedly, walked across the hall and back with the illustrated paper in question.

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It was a copy of Country Life, and as Frances Eliot opened it at the first page she exclaimed eagerly: "Oh, why did nobody tell us about this before? It's full of the most fascinating advertisements of country houses for sale and to let. And—why, it seems to be only one of the advertisements which the lady has cut out! Nothing exciting after all. I suppose, like us, they're wanting a house, and they thought this might suit them."

Dolores looked over her mother's shoulder at the square hole in the page of attractive advertisements which illustrated and set forth the charms of various mansions, ancient and modern. "They didn't act as if they'd found something they wanted, but something they didn't want," said she.

"That's so," agreed Frances. "They did both behave in a mysterious sort of way. And it couldn't have been their own advertisement, or else they wouldn't have seemed surprised to see it. Only a house! It must have been that, because it's right in the midst of a page with nothing but houses on it. I wonder if there was anything very interesting in the advertisement. This paper is dated a week ago. I've half a mind to send out and try to buy a duplicate, and see once and for all what those people were so upset about. Yes, I will. There's no reason why I shouldn't." And before Dolores could object, even if she had been inclined to make objection, Mrs. Eliot beckoned one of the gorgeous servants of the hotel. She paid for the tea and cakes, and asked the man to send out at once for a copy of last week's Country Life.

Meanwhile she and Dolores put their heads together over the mutilated paper, keenly interested in the long list of places for sale or to let. There were many beautiful ones, but nothing whose description drew them irresistibly, and they had

finished their search before the whole copy which Frances had ordered was brought to them magnificently on a large silver tray.

Mother and daughter had begun to realize how tired they were, and how nice a cool bath would be, but the moment they saw the missing advertisement they shed their fatigue as they had shed their dust cloaks.

"What a heavenly place!" exclaimed Frances, gazing at the photograph of a wonderful old Tudor house, its walls checkered in black oak and white plaster, with trefoils, quatrefoils, and chevrons diapered in picturesque ornamentation over all. The upper stories, rich in strange oak carving, and with exquisite diamond-paned windows, projected quaintly; the gabled roofs and elaborate chimneys were festooned with ivy, and the rambling irregular building, as seen in the picture, had a moat in the foreground with a curious drawbridge.

"O mother!" Dolores almost gasped. "It looks too good to be true! It must be a dream. And how I should love to be in the dream, wouldn't you?"

"We will be in it—the house, I mean, not the dream," answered Frances, firmly and practically; "that is, if somebody else hasn't got it before us. It looks just what we want. Why, it's so beautiful it's like some great, big, splendid toy! And just listen to this."

She began to read aloud the paragraph underneath the picture which described the house and estate in glowing colors.

"Queen's Quadrangles" was the name of the place, which consisted of a thousand acres of gardens, meadows, and parkland, with two farms. "Of unique historic interest," according to the advertisement, Queen's Quadrangles had been built by a grandee of Spain, a follower in the train of Philip

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II, who had married a rich Englishwoman, a protegée of Mary Tudor. Mary had helped to plan the place, according to the story, and Queen's Quadrangles it had been named in her honor and because of its Cypress Court and Fountain Court. There was a grand hall, stone paved and paneled in oak, with a remarkably beautiful staircase; a dining hall, also paneled, with a minstrel's gallery; a magnificent ballroom, a private chapel, and, as the description put it, "many other extraordinarily interesting features which combined to make Queen's Quadrangles one of the finest old houses in England." There were terraces and a large lake, Italian and Dutch gardens, and a water garden arranged in Moorish fashion to imitate the general life at Granada. There were trees planted by Charles I and his queen, Henrietta Maria, and so many other inducements to tempt readers of the paper into wishing to possess the place that the paragraph describing them attained to quite an abnormal length. But the place was not advertised for sale. It was only "to be let, furnished, for a short, or preferably a long, term."

No price was named, but, having fallen hopelessly in love with the photograph, Frances Eliot felt that she would stop at nothing within reason. She had wanted to buy a house, if she could find the right one, and make it her home—Dolores's home after her. Now she was sure that she had found the right place, and since she could not own it, the next best thing would be to secure it for as long a time as possible.

Her worst fear was that, as the paper with the advertisement was but one day less than a week old, the place might already have been snapped up by somebody else, and although Dolores persisted in her opinion that the "interesting people" neither owned nor wished to own it, Frances suspected some

mysterious intention on their part which augured ill for her hopes.

By this time it was nearly six o'clock, but consulting together she and Dolores agreed that the offices of the advertising agent might still be open. Tired as they were, there was no question in their minds as to what they must do. They would order a cab—a motor cab, if possible, so as to get there quickly—and drive at once to Wilcox & May's.

"What if we find those people there before us?" asked Frances, a few minutes later, as they were spinning toward Pall Mall.

"We won't find them," said Dolores confidently.

"Then why did they take such an interest in that paragraph?" persisted her mother.

"Whatever their reason was," Dolores answered, speaking more to herself than to Frances, "it was deeper down and—and stranger than anything we've thought of."

"You're so romantic!" exclaimed Frances.

Dolores did not attempt to defend herself.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ONE CONDITION

ESSRS. WILCOX & MAY, the London estate agents who make a specialty of letting and selling old houses of historic interest, were on the point of closing their office for the night when the motor cab stopped before the door. Frances Eliot and Dolores almost ran in, their hearts beating with dread lest they might be doomed to sixteen long hours of suspense.

A youth reassured them with the news that Mr. May was still in his office and willing to be interviewed. A moment more and they were ushered into the presence of this responsible gentleman, who looked almost worthy to have the disposal of Queen's Quadrangles.

Frances at once produced the paper, which she had brought with her, and pointed to the important paragraph. "Is that place still to be had?" she asked, trying warily not to seem too eager.

"Yes," replied Mr. May, "fortunately, as we are the sole agents, I am able to assure you that it is still unlet. You see, it has only been advertised for a week or two, and as the house is one of the most beautiful and interesting to be found in England, the rent asked is not—precisely—cheap."

As he spoke his experienced eye noted the fact that his client was an American of the better class, rich no doubt, and probably willing to spend money.

"What is the rent?" inquired Frances, a little anxious, but feeling more and more that she could not live without Queen's Quadrangles.

"Fifty guineas a week if let for a short period, or two thousand guineas a year if taken by the year. But that includes the wages of two gardeners and several other servants who—er—go with the place."

As he added this last bit of information, it appeared that Mr. May was slightly embarrassed, and Frances was quick to notice the change in his manner from rather pompous assurance to something almost apologetic. Had it not been for this just perceptible hesitation of his, she would have supposed it quite the usual thing in England for a number of servants to "go with" a place when it was let, but as it was she caught the agent up promptly. She wanted to live at Queen's Quadrangles more than she could ever remember wanting anything in her life—except that Dolores should grow up to be a pretty girl—but she did not mean to be led blindfold into saddling herself with a place which, after all, was not what it advertised itself to be.

"Oh, there are servants who go with the place?" she said cautiously.

"Yes. An additional advantage," the agent assured her.

"The indoor servants who must be kept on by a new tenant are a very competent butler and an accomplished cook who have been in the service of the owner for so many years that she makes it a condition of letting that they must not be discharged. But plenty of extra servants can, of course, be engaged."

Mrs. Eliot's "Oh!" expressed relief. "I should have no objection to keeping the old servants, as they are competent."

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("Even if incompetent," she added mentally, for by this time she felt that she must have the place.) Two thousand guineas a year was equal to about ten thousand dollars, she hurriedly calculated. She could easily afford to pay that. She had even expected the price to be higher, for she knew what one would pay at Newport for a furnished "cottage" taken for the season. It did not, therefore, occur to her to haggle, and the agent, who had been prepared to come down step by step, was inwardly delighted. But he knew that all danger was not yet over. There were one or two details to be gone into which might prove stumbling blocks, as they had more than once already, in this business of letting the fine old place known as Queen's Quadrangles. He would therefore enumerate all attractive features before hinting at others perhaps not wholly attractive.

From a drawer he took out several sheets of typewritten paper and a bundle of photographs. "Perhaps you would like to glance over these," he said, "though, no doubt, you will wish to visit the place and decide as soon as possible, for, I must mention, we are having constant applications since we began to advertise."

Frances and Dolores looked at the photographs together. They were views of several magnificent rooms, furnished sparsely but beautifully in antique fashion; of a large court with a marble fountain in the center, and another containing four tall Italian cypresses. This latter, Mr. May explained, was a copy, on a grander scale, of something in the palace of the Alhambra at Granada. Also there were photographs of terraces and gardens, and one showing a lake which reflected clearly the black and white pattern on one wall of the distant house. The typewritten pages contained descriptions for

which space could not be given in the advertisement, and when they had gone through all Mr. May was pleased, though not surprised, to see that the eyes of both his clients were sparkling with excited admiration.

"I suppose," he said cautiously, "that it's not possible you would care to make up your mind, madam, on the strength of what you have seen and what I have told you? Of course, I don't urge this, and only suggest it, as we have personally inspected Queen's Quadrangles and can assure you the place is all it's represented to be, and more. We have had people in making inquiries every day, and could have let over and over again during the last week, if in some cases the rent had not been an objection, and in others those offering to be tenants had not been themselves objectionable. But I think I understand that the price would not be too much for a lady in your position, madam?" (tone and emphasis hinted a compliment); "and you might be annoyed if some one else came in first thing to-morrow morning and told us they would take Queen's Quadrangles for certain, before you had had time to communicate with us after waiting to inspect."

Frances was tempted, for the idea that the house of her desire should be snatched away was intolerable. But her husband had made his fortune by obstinately developing all that was practical in his nature, and she often vaunted herself to Dolores as an eminently sensible woman. It would not do, whatever happened, to lose this advantage with the girl who lived her life as if it were a charming dream.

- "The-the drainage is good?" she demanded.
- "Guaranteed to be excellent. The only modern thing in this wonderful old house."
 - "And—and the place hasn't fallen out of repair?"

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The agent fingered the photographs and counted them over. "Oh," he said lightly, "if it were in too perfect a state of repair it would lose much of its picturesqueness. But there is nothing in the least ruinous, I assure you. Taking it altogether, there isn't such a desirable estate in the market, nor is there likely to be again. Think, too, of the advantages in being so near London. In the county of Surrey, the house to be reached in less than two hours."

"O mother, do say you'll take it," half whispered Dolores. But Frances wavered, fighting her own inclinations.

"I don't remember if I mentioned that the social advantages of the neighborhood are very great, as well as the beauties of the surrounding country," remarked Mr. May, as if carelessly and on a second thought. "The Duke of Bridgewater's seat practically adjoins the estate. I believe him to be a very courteous gentleman, quite a well-known author, too, with one young unmarried son, the Marquis of Tillingbourne, who is in the army. Then there is Lord Chilford—the Earl of Chilford, you know—within easy driving distance, and a number of other titled persons who own fine places near by. Also, there is an important garrison town not too far away, if you care for military shows and society, madam."

"It all sounds very delightful," said Frances, in whose ears the names of the English nobility sounded not unmusically. "But couldn't you give me the refusal of the place until after I've run out to see it and got back to London?"

"I regret to say that would be impossible, madam," replied the agent gravely. "Others who have had orders to view may return when the office opens to-morrow morning, and close with us at once."

Frances Eliot felt a constriction of the throat, and Do-

lores's eyes were large and sad as a starving faun's. "Well, I don't know, perhaps I'd better say I will," began the practical little lady, beguiled beyond her strength. But on the brink of the precipice she paused, struggling for a foothold. "It sounds almost too good," she said. "Are you sure there aren't any drawbacks—or—conditions you haven't told me about yet?"

"No drawbacks, madam, but one condition, which I've not yet had time to mention," Mr. May admitted with due dignity.

"A condition?" Frances's heart grew heavy with the weight of presentiment. Yes, of course it had been too good to be true.

"Only this. The owner of Queen's Quadrangles, a widow with no living children, desires to remain in charge of the house, either as housekeeper or over a housekeeper. She can accept no tenant who is not willing to allow her this position; but many people would consider this an added advantage: her knowledge of the place, the servants, and the neighborhood would be invaluable. We have her written word for it that she would in no way put herself forward. The only status she desires to have is that of housekeeper, although her position entitles her to something very different."

"It's a queer thing that she should want to stay on in that way," said Frances. "I should hate it myself."

"I suppose she loves the place too dearly to leave it," suggested Dolores.

"Yes, but—is she really a lady?" Frances asked the agent.

"Quite a lady." He smiled almost in a superior manner. "Her only son, who has been dead for some years, broke the entail for her sake, otherwise, on his death, Queen's Quad-

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rangles would have passed out of the immediate family to the next male heir, a distant relative. In the circumstances, perhaps it is natural that the owner wishes to stay in her home."

"She wouldn't sell?"

"No. That has been proposed. But she refuses. However, if you become attached to the place and wish to keep it, it's possible that being on the spot you may persuade the lady to change her mind."

This was an inducement; but Frances had now got the idea firmly rooted in her head that the agent was trying to hypnotize her into agreeing to take the estate without seeing it. It seemed likely to her that the eccentric owner might be a mad woman, or so impossible in some other way as to spoil all the pleasure of living even in so beautiful a place as Queen's Quadrangles.

"How long did you say it took to get there from London?" she inquired.

"By fast train to Godeshall, which is the quickest way, the journey takes just over an hour; but it's a longish drive afterwards."

"What about motoring?"

Dolores was surprised at this question from her mother. Frances had not yet quite accustomed herself to motor cars, and had been terrified in the taximeter cab, which was still ticking away the time in the street before the office door.

"You might reach the house in rather less than two hours. Starting, say at nine to-morrow—"

"I was thinking of this evening so that I could let you know the first thing in the morning."

Mr. May raised his eyebrows. These American women were wonderful! But if this particular specimen of the race were

determined not to take Queen's Quadrangles without seeing it, from his point of view it would be better that she should see the house for the first time by twilight rather than in an uncompromising glare of sunshine. So he said "Very well, madam," without showing astonishment, and began to write out an order to view.

Frances took the bit of paper from him eagerly. "You think they'll let us in, even though it is evening?" she asked.

"I'm sure of that," he answered.

Then, having taken his client's name and address, he bowed the mother and daughter out of the office.

It was not until Frances and Dolores had actually started on their long journey in the motor cab that they remembered with some mortification that they had not asked the name of their prospective landlady.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HOUSEKEEPER

WILIGHT had fallen when they arrived at the little village of Clere, and stopped at a quaint sixteenth-century inn to inquire the way to Queen's Quadrangles, which they hoped was not more than two miles away; but it was a twilight brightened by a moon nearly full.

Frances and Dolores were both rather hungry, but they could not have settled down to a meal until their suspense was over, and luckily, as they reminded each other, they had eaten plenty of buttered toast at tea time. Already it was so late as to make a visit of inspection and inquiry very unusual, almost eccentric, and they could not afford to delay a minute; but they promised themselves to stop at Clere on the way home and have supper at the inn. This was an adventure, and it did not matter at what hour they got back to their hotel in London.

They had reached England only a week ago, having crossed on a French ship and spent a fortnight in Paris. Until now, save for the flashing journey from Dover to London, and their frantic explorations in search of houses, they had seen nothing of the country. Surrey was "what they had dreamed of," they told each other: so peaceful, so exquisite, and so beautifully old; but Clere was better even than their dreams, though it seemed like one, even to practical Frances,

in this mingling of hyacinth-blue twilight and silver floods of moonshine.

The motor cab slipped almost silently through the main street of the village, and on either side they saw toy houses and cottages of mellow old brick, or pale yellow plaster, with thatched roofs and diamond-paned windows curtained with honeysuckle and roses. Here and there on the outskirts of the pretty hamlet was a larger, more important house, whose plain façade and long lines of white-framed windows dated from the first days of the Georges, or perhaps Queen Anne. Then they swept out into the country again, passing a few comparatively modern villas and charming old farmhouses, turned to the left at an important-looking lodge which, from directions given at the White Lion, they knew to be the property of the Duke of Bridgewater, and having mounted a hill where the road was arbored with beeches and chestnuts, they arrived at an imposing stone gateway whose tall carved posts were gold and green with crusted lichen.

Now their hearts were beating fast; for this was the principal entrance to the park of Queen's Quadrangles, and in a few minutes more they would know their fate. But the gates were closed, and there was no light in the picturesque black-and-white lodge. The chauffeur reluctantly got out and opened one gate, Frances and Dolores drawing long breaths of relief as it swung back, for they had feared that it might be locked and the lodgekeeper away. Indeed, as the car turned into the avenue shadowed by vast oaks, they vaguely feared many things, they scarcely knew what, but disappointment of some sort.

The avenue was long and winding, always under the shade of great trees, oaks, and beeches, with meadows on one side

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and parkland on the other. Then suddenly they came in sight of a house whose beauty gave them a shock of joy, gazing at it across lawns and terraces.

These lawns, with their groups of copper beeches and huge Lebanon cedars old as the Crusades, the motor cab had to circle round until it reached the north front of the house, and crossed the drawbridge Frances and Dolores had seen in the photograph. Many years, perhaps, had passed since that bridge had been raised, and its posts and chains were overhung with masses of dark ivy. The moon's reflection lay like a fallen silver cup in the water of the moat, shining in a clear space between white water lilies; and beyond was the shadowy arch of the main entrance, a great open porch with a fine stone bench on either side, and splendid double doors of carved, nail-studded oak.

Nothing could have looked less in keeping with such a house than a throbbing blue-and-red motor cab, and the two Americans felt impertinently modern and out of the picture as they descended to lift a huge knocker. Not a light was to be seen in any window of this north front, though as the car had circled round the avenue the unexpected visitors had caught a yellow gleam or two which now they had lost again.

No one answered the first knock, and they had time to point out to each other the six tall, formally cut yews which Mr. May had called Queen Henrietta Maria's "Maids of Honor," to discover on the left a distant sheet of silver which meant the lake, and to admire the stone vases on a carved terrace wall. Then Dolores knocked again, having peered about in vain for any such modern innovation as a bell, and at last there was a sound which told them that the doors were being

not only opened but unlocked. One was pulled back far enough to show a dim gleam of lamplight, and in its halo the figure of an old man. He stared out into the twilight, surprised, clean-shaven, his heavy white face and almost bald head, his big round eyes behind gold-rimmed spectacles, making him look more like an owl than a butler, yet a butler he evidently was; and seeing that the visitors were ladies, he opened the door somewhat wider.

"We've come to see the house, if possible," explained Frances hastily and apologetically, gazing with curiosity into a stone-paved, oak-walled entrance hall which apparently led into another hall of immense size. "I know it's very late, but we came straight here from the London agents."

The old man was very old indeed. It was not to be imagined that he had ever been young; and one would not deliberately choose a butler with a mere fringe of snowy hair, less than the meanest allowance of tonsure, thought Frances; nevertheless, he had the true manner of a servant in a grand house, and, after all, the keeping him on would be no drawback to the possession of Queen's Quadrangles: therefore one doubt was settled on the threshold.

As he ushered the visitors through the entrance hall, past a magnificent carved screen, into the great hall beyond, the butler took up the lamp which he had placed on a carved Jacobean chest, and the vast, dim space beyond had no other light save the blue and silver radiance which filtered in through enormous windows. These, on either side of the huge hall, were diamond-paned, the leadwork, outlined in black against the twilight, forming elaborate patterns according to the graceful ideas of Tudor times. But many of the window sashes were thrown back, and the newcomers could see that

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the hall was placed between two large, open courts; the one to the right having a fountain in the center, the one to the left beautified by four tall Italian cypresses.

The butler set the lamp he carried on a refectory table of black oak, which stood in the middle of the hall, and begging the visitors to be seated, said that he would call "her ladyship."

"He really is a dear old thing," whispered Frances, as he passed beyond earshot, limping slightly. "I wonder if he'll call me 'her ladyship,' when—that is, if—we take the place."

Dolores did not answer, because she did not hear. The house possessed her, absorbed her. She felt, sitting in the beautiful hall, in this mysterious blue and silver twilight gilded by the yellow star of the lamp, as she had felt sometimes when listening to the music of a noble church organ. Dimly, as her eyes accustomed themselves to the dusk, she traced the richly carved pattern of the oak wainscoting, which reached to the high ceiling, and saw in the circle of lamplight how the vague tints of the stone-flagged pavement came out, in soft, purplish gray streaked or splashed with yellow. She wondered at the size of the splendid old fireplace, with a stone wolf on either side, holding each a shield where the gold and red and blue of a coat of arms had faded into a blur of mingling color. She saw that there were two noble staircases leading to a gallery above; and then, as her eyes strove to conquer the darkness, a figure seemed to grow out of it, coming down the stairway on the right: a woman's figure, dressed in black.

So erect was it, and daintily modeled, that it seemed to be the figure of a girl; but, having descended the stairs, it moved toward the center of the hall where the visitors sat, and came

into the small circle of lamplight. Then the face was illuminated clearly, and it was not the face of a girl, but of a beautiful woman, whose beauty was dimmed though not obliterated by years of self-repression or suffering.

The mistress of Queen's Quadrangles was of a type never seen before by the two Americans. Her face was of the sort which ought never to grow old. There was a kind of frozen youth about it still, though fifty years at least had marked it, and not wholly in love.

The idea came to Dolores that the woman was like a delicate white rose which, just as it neared the perfection of its bloom, had felt the nip of frost, and then, before it could fall, had been dipped in some preserving fluid which would keep it ever the same—not beautiful as it had been, yet in a pale likeness of past loveliness. Yes, it was a young woman's face grown suddenly old, before it had passed through the mellowing changes of middle life; and now it seemed that it could never alter more.

A strange pity mingled with admiration sprang up in Dolores's heart. This woman who came gracefully to greet them—gracefully and graciously as a queen, though her plain black dress might have been "second best" for a self-respecting housekeeper—looked as if she had once been a spoiled darling, made for love and sensuous happiness; a sweet, petted child of sunshine. But her hair was silver white now in the lamplight, and every line of those delicate features, which would have been adored by a miniature painter, had been hardened unnaturally by the effort to endure privation or sorrow.

Perhaps Frances Eliot did not see all this; but Dolores saw at a glance, and was ashamed of the keen curiosity the

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woman's face aroused in her, though that curiosity was entirely sympathetic.

Mother and daughter both rose, as the figure in black advanced to them, and Frances plunged at once into explanations. They were dreadfully sorry to be late, but they had so wanted to see the place, and yet had feared to risk losing it by waiting until to-morrow. They hoped they were not disturbing Mrs.—Mrs.—

"My name is Rosamund Vane-Eliot," answered the mistress of the house, speaking for the first time, in a sweet, though curiously repressed voice. "Strangers call me Lady Rosamund."

This was a double shock. She was an Eliot; and the butler's "her ladyship" had meant more than the exaggerated respect of an old servant. Neither Frances nor Dolores had ever met anybody whose name had a "handle," and last of all had they expected to meet one in the person of their landlady. But a thing still more extraordinary was that she should be an Eliot.

"My name is Eliot, too," almost stammered Frances, who had but lately been reserved as to her husband's ancestry. "I—I'm American, but my husband was English. I don't know much about his people, except that there was a poor branch and a rich branch, and that it was an old family. He didn't care to talk of them, and he never told me the name of their place, if they had one, as I suppose they must have had. Goodness! how very queer if we should be related, and if—if this house——"

"It's quite possible," the lady replied, when Frances paused, somewhat embarrassed as to how to go on, or whether it would be safer not to go on at all. "Is it a coincidence that

you should have come here to see this place, or did my agent tell you the name of the owners and so interest you in it?"

"We forgot to ask your name, we were in such a hurry," said Frances.

"He told you nothing about the family, then?"...

"Nothing at all. He only showed us the photographs and description. I'd just seen the advertisement in an illustrated paper."

Dolores, watching in fascination the beautiful, faded face, saw a sudden light of relief flash across it; and the curiosity of which she was ashamed grew keener than ever. Why was the lady glad, she wondered, that the agent had said nothing about the family?

"Ah! then it is rather an odd coincidence that our names should happen to be the same," said the soft voice, out of which the slight thrill of emotion had suddenly died, leaving only courteous indifference to a possible relationship. "You really think of renting the place?"

"Yes, indeed," answered Frances. "I am very anxious to have it — more anxious than ever, now that I've seen it, and——"

"You have hardly seen it yet," said the other. "I will take you over the house, but as I have lived here alone with a very few servants for many years, seeing no one, only the two or three rooms which I occupy are lighted at night."

Frances protested that she had already seen enough to enable her to decide, but Lady Rosamund Vane-Eliot would not accept her impatient suggestion that a tour of the house could be made another day. She and the butler, Soames, each carrying a lamp, conducted Mrs. Eliot and her daughter from one end of Queen's Quadrangles to the other, leading

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them through a magnificent dining hall, reached by a long gallery running round one end of the fountain court, to a large drawing-room and a smaller one, on to the ballroom, and a splendid library. On the ground floor, besides these immense rooms (the great central hall and the two Moorish courts) were ranged along the north front, to the left of the stone-walled entrance hall, a beautiful private chapel, with painted window glass of the early sixteenth century; a priest's room and a steward's room. To the right of the entrance lay the servants' hall, and various domestic offices, each room marvelously beamed with old oak. On the floor above were many bedrooms and dressing rooms, and two or three quaintly pretty boudoirs. Frances was exclamatory in her rapture, and Dolores lost in silent wonder at the thought that such a place might become her home. "It would be like living in a romance," she said to herself, a romance all the more exciting if it could in any way be proved that the Vane-Eliot family of Queen's Quadrangles was connected with the Eliots of whom her dead father had been one.

Vane-Eliots had lived here—so said the widow of the last—since the days of Elizabeth. Don Filipo de Casa Meliflor, who had built the house, had married a Mistress Margaret Vane, and as there had been no son, the place had come into the possession of her people. The Vanes and Eliots had intermarried, and the names had been joined together; but now, explained Lady Rosamund hastily, as if eager to answer a question and finish the subject forever, the last Vane-Eliot was gone. Another family estate of equal importance with this had become the property of a distant relation named Eliot.

"A cousin of poor Richard's, perhaps," thought Frances, deeply interested. But aloud she made no comment. Some-

thing in Lady Rosamund's manner—though Frances was not as sensitive as her daughter—told her that the mistress of Queen's Quadrangles would have avoided talking of the family if she could without ungraciousness.

"After all it's no wonder, as Mr. May said it was her only son who died and left her this place, by cutting the entail—whatever that is," the little American woman thought, with an impulse of sympathy. And then, having returned at last to the great hall, Frances set herself as tactfully as possible to solve the mystery of that odd "condition" which she was now able to understand less than ever. It could not be, she was sure, that this lady—a great lady, it would appear, in manner as well as by virtue of title—could possibly wish to stay on in the house in a subordinate position. There must be a mistake. Mr. May had certainly confused Lady Rosamund with some other person.

It seemed easy enough to ask, and yet when she began, it proved difficult. Frances hesitated and showed that she was confused, as she beat about the bush wherein lurked the question.

"There—there was something about a condition," she faltered. "I don't think I could have quite understood your agent. I——"

"You mean that I stipulate, if the place is let, to be allowed to act as housekeeper for the tenant?" cut in Lady Rosamund quietly.

"Yes. But is it really you—not some one else?"

"There is no one else."

Frances stood amazed and deeply embarrassed. "How could I have you for a—a housekeeper?" she argued. "You, with your title——"

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Lady Rosamund laughed with a ring of bitterness. "My title!" she echoed. "That is nothing. When you've lived in England longer, you will see how little a title can meansometimes. I want very much to let this place, Mrs. Eliot. I need the money. But-I can't go away. I hope you will take the house. I assure you, I wouldn't trouble you at all. And I think I'm not a bad manager. I could satisfy you, I believe, as your housekeeper. And you need see no more of me than you would if I were the ordinary kind. Indeed, I should much prefer that. If you would not mind, I should like to use the steward's room, which you saw, as my sitting room, instead of the one that used to belong to the housekeeper before my day. That would be the only favor I should ask, except to keep on the two old servants I could not bear to see turned out. But then, the keeping them was part of the condition, was it not? "

Frances, utterly bewildered, assented. To have a Lady Rosamund Vane-Eliot for her housekeeper was, in a way, a distinction; but it was an embarrassing distinction, and one with which she would gladly have dispensed; but—anything rather than give up Queen's Quadrangles now that she had seen it. She told Lady Rosamund that she should certainly take the place, and that she would not only send a letter to reach Mr. May the first thing in the morning, but would herself be at his office the moment it opened. Having decided once and for all, she was no longer cautious about betraying eagerness; and as she talked on about the pleasure she expected to find in living at Queen's Quadrangles "for years and years," Lady Rosamund's large, sad eyes regarded her with a curious wistfulness, not unlike compunction. Dolores, listening always in silence, as befitted a young girl between

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two older women, saw this strange, fixed look, and wondered at it.

"Does Lady Rosamund know of some reason why we won't be happy here?" she asked herself. "Some reason which she can't tell, because it is so necessary for her that we come and yet she is sorry for our disappointment?"

Such a fancy seemed morbid and silly, and Dolores—who was in reality neither morbid nor silly—tried to put it away. But for the moment her new joy of possession was dampened. It was as if in some bright, beautiful room she had opened a door which she had not seen at first, and found hidden there something dark and ugly.

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AT THE SIGN OF THE WHITE LION

I was useless, of course, to attempt seeing by moonlight the gardens and orchard, the park and farms, the stables, coach houses, and kennels, which would come into the possession of the new tenants of Queen's Quadrangles; but Lady Rosamund Vane-Eliot cordially offered her visitors refreshment. Her dinner, the simplest of meals, she confessed, was over; yet there would be something which might pass as supper if Mrs. Eliot and her daughter would have it.

With thanks they declined, and Lady Rosamund did not press them to change their minds. If she did not look relieved when Frances announced that they must be going at once, she certainly appeared neither hurt nor disappointed. The place, she said, was ready and at their service whenever they chose to come in, and Frances replied that their wish would be to arrive in a few days. All formalities should be gone through as soon as possible with the agents, and meanwhile they would be looking forward with the pleasantest anticipations to their new life. "You will tell me," Frances finished rather timidly, "all about the—about English etiquette, and that sort of thing, won't you? It will be a great advantage for us having you here on that account, if you will be so kind as to give us a few hints."

"I am afraid I don't quite understand," said Lady Rosamund.

"I mean," explained Frances, "about returning calls, and entertaining, and all that. I shall want to do everything in a way worthy of Queen's Quadrangles, and—and the Vane-Eliots, who were perhaps my husband's ancestors."

For an instant Lady Rosamund was silent, and Frances had a faint, mortified pang lest she were offended by this last claim. But after the slight pause she answered gently that she would always be glad to give such advice and help as she could. Then the three bade each other good-by, and the butler showed the Americans out with his most gracious ancient-servitor-of-the-nobility manner.

Neither mother nor daughter spoke, as the motor cab spun them away. They were absorbed in looking back, taking in the charm and dignity of the old house which was to be their new home.

"I feel as if all the wishes I'd ever wished had suddenly come true," said Frances. "We shall have to live up to this place, Lolita."

"Yes," answered the girl. "One ought to be very noble in mind and beautiful in body to be appropriate to Queen's Quadrangles."

Frances laughed happily. "Well, you are beautiful, girlie. As people have told you that, ever since the day you were born, it can't make you conceited for me to say it, too. As for me, I must do my best. But I can't feel equal even to the thought of my high duties till I've had something to eat. I didn't want to bother her; but I kept myself up with the idea of that dear little inn. We'll stop now and have supper there."

So when they came to the village of Clere, Frances told the

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chauffeur to stop the car at The White Lion, whose ancient sign creaked welcomingly in the breeze.

There was a tiny, wainscoted hall, with a taproom on one side—showing brave gleams of copper and old pewter through a half-open door—and a coffee room on the other.

Into the latter the landlord himself escorted his two guests—a little man, who might have saved up money as a coachman. He stood rubbing large-knuckled hands together, and smiling a quaint three-cornered smile as he named over the things which he could provide, even at such short notice, for supper. As the ladies did not much mind what they ate, food was not long in coming, and the beamed, low-ceilinged room was so charming, the landlord so deferential, that the admiring Americans fell into a friendly mood. The old man waited upon them himself, superintending a maid, and was delighted to answer their questions about the neighborhood, from the household of His Grace down to that of the village doctor.

"I suppose Queen's Quadrangles is one of the oldest places you have about here?" asked Frances, leading up to an announcement later on—an announcement which she was guilelessly sure would greatly interest so polite and pleasant a person.

"Yes, madam, and one of the finest," he answered to his hearer's delight. It was nice to have this disinterested information from a man who could have no idea of their intentions, and Frances determined to extract more before giving any on her part.

"Although, of course, it's unfortunately been allowed to go down a bit these late years," the landlord added, arranging cheese and biscuits on the sideboard.

- "Oh, it has gone down, has it?" asked Frances.
- "The money 'aving went to the new baronet, on the death of 'er ladyship's son, and she getting the estate with no visible means of keeping it up," the old fellow explained.
- "Then the son who died was a baronet?" echoed Frances.
 "I knew there was a title, but I thought—"
- "Oh, if you 'ave no knowledge of the family, madam, 'twould be difficult to understand, 'er ladyship being Lady Rosamund," broke in the host, deference for his guests fighting with a sense of importance in dealing with foreigners unversed in the intricacies of English titles. "You see, she was the daughter of a marquis, but her late 'usbin, Sir Digby Vane-Eliot, dating from the twelfth century—as a title, I mean, madam—and being at the time of the marriage a rich gentleman with two fine estates, it was not thought that 'er ladyship made a bad match."
- "Is a marquis a good deal higher than a baronet in rank?" inquired Frances, not ashamed of ignorance in details considered trifling in her native land.
- "Yes, madam. A marquis ranks next to a duke," replied the landlord, mouthing the high titles with respect. "And a marquis's daughter can keep 'er courtesy title when marrying a baronet or knight."
- "I see," said Frances, struck with awe at the thought of having the daughter of a marquis (to say nothing of the widow of a baronet) as a housekeeper—wageless—who, like the servants, "went with the place." It was really appalling!
- "The county people and gentry hereabouts thought 'twas almost a pity about cutting the entail," continued the old man, as he set a plum tart and a jug of cream on the table. "There being no money, except what 'er ladyship may 'ave,

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and no one seems to know 'ow much that is, it does look as if 'twould 'ave been better for Lost Court to be in 'ands able to keep it up."

"'Lost Court?'" repeated Frances. "What is that?"

The wizened face of the old man suddenly changed, and lost its little polite, three-cornered smile. "Oh, well, madam," he answered reluctantly, "it's a nickname we 'ave in the countryside for Queen's Quadrangles; but it slipped my tongue, madam, I assure you, as I would not wish to fail in respect to 'er ladyship."

"But why are you failing in respect to her ladyship by giving the place that name?" Frances persisted.

"On account of the story, madam. Sir Digby in his life pooh-poohed it, so I've 'eerd; and as for 'er ladyship, she can't bear it, folks say."

"What is the story?" asked Mrs. Eliot, though her daughter's eyes were disapproving. Dolores could not have told why, but vaguely it seemed to her that there was a kind of treachery to the sad lady of Queen's Quadrangles in asking these questions of a gossiping old man at a village inn.

"Strange you've never 'eerd it, madam, knowing something of the place, as you do," said the landlord. "It's not come to your ears, then, that Queen's Quadrangles is sometimes called the House of the Lost Court?"

Frances shook her head. "That's a strange name," she commented. "What can it mean?"

"Why, only that there was supposed to be, in the old days, three courts instead of two: that the house was built in that fashion with three quadrangles, so to speak, one with a fountain, one with four cypresses, and one with—nobody knows what. But, of course, it's only a tale, madam, and a scandal-

ous tale in some ways. Folks say the Spaniards brought over by the grand don who made the house, in Queen Mary's and her Consort Philip's day, babbled about that third court, and the grandee's real reason for having it. And they say, too, that 'twas known to exist, for several generations at least afterwards; but then it seemed to disappear in some miraculous manner, or else the house was altered before the memory of those who write histories of big houses, and so the court was finally done away with. Only the name and the story of it has never been forgotten."

"I shall ask Lady Rosamund," said Frances, "to tell me about the third court, and what really became of it, if it ever was there."

Instantly the little old man stiffened into prudence, throwing a sharp look at the American lady who, posing as a tourist, had drawn him on to gossip, by concealing the fact that she was an acquaintance of the mistress of Queen's Quadrangles.

"Why, yes, madam, that would be the best way," he responded primly. "Er ladyship could tell you, if so be as there's anything to tell, which I mistrust, except the old tale bein' an amusement for strangers and sightseers in these parts. By my way o' thinkin', 'twas most likely invented for that in the beginning. I can give you some nice fresh plums to finish up with if you like, madam."

Dolores stifled a laugh. To finish up a tale of mystery abruptly with some nice fresh plums was a maneuver which appealed to the girl's sense of humor. But Frances saw nothing funny in the landlord's sudden accession of prudence. She was merely annoyed with herself for the rash speech which had frightened the old fellow into caution. She accepted his

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offer of plums, and suggested coffee as well, in the hope of pleasing her host; but try as she would, she could extract from him no more gossip concerning Queen's Quadrangles or those who had owned and lived in the place from generation to generation.

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FRANCES ASKS A QUESTION

RANCES ELIOT was very happy and excited for the next two or three days. There were various details of business to settle with the agents, and there were a good many things to buy for Dolores and herself.

In novels written round English country-house life, Frances had read of garden parties and stately dinners. She expected to be invited to plenty of these, and to give them in return. Probably she and Dolores would eventually become acquainted with the duke and his family, as well as various neighboring earls and other personages of importance. She bought a peerage, and having with some trouble mastered its minor intricacies, learned to her delight that the county of Surrey abounded with nobility and gentry. Sooner or later she would, she supposed, know them all; for she was taking Queen's Quadrangles for a period of five years, with the privilege of first refusal in case she desired to remain as a tenant even longer.

Frances wanted earnestly and conscientiously to be a credit to the name of Eliot, and to carry on all the best family traditions, whether Richard's Eliots had been connected with the Vane-Eliots or not. Her husband's taciturnity on the subject of the "rich branch" of Eliots made this fact somewhat difficult to find out; but she determined that, when she learned to know Lady Rosamund, she would ask to see the "family tree"; and if it had been kept up to date, or nearly, she would probably be able to discover all she wished to know.

It was decided that Frances and her daughter, with a maid engaged in London, should go to Queen's Quadrangles for "good and all," on the Monday morning following the end of the negotiations. Mother and daughter had been tempted to run down for another look at the place, meanwhile; but there had been a great deal to do in town in the short interval; and besides, Dolores thought it would be more perfect to keep the glories of park and gardens for "a surprise," until Queen's Quadrangles was actually their own. Frances spent much time and money, therefore, in buying for herself and her daughter numerous dresses and hats which wise milliners advised her would be appropriate as well as charming for country-house gayeties.

For Dolores, whose flowerlike, Southern beauty was beyond compare in Frances's eyes, there were frocks for tennis, for croquet, for garden parties, and dinner and ball gowns suitable to a young débutante. If the Duchess of Bridgewater had not, unfortunately for newcomers in the neighborhood, reposed in the family vault for some years, Frances would certainly have planned that she should be persuaded to present Dolores—perhaps Dolores's mother—in the following spring; but as it was, a mere countess or viscountess would have to do; or perhaps Lady Rosamund Vane-Eliot herself, if the fact that she had taken up the rôle of housekeeper would not prevent her from appearing at court.

Frances was between two minds about buying a motor car, and going down in it to her new-old home; but after a day or two of indecision she decided to wait. The sort of people she wanted to know were old-fashioned folk of aristocratic solidity,

and vaguely she felt that such persons might not approve of motor cars. Lady Rosamund kept no horses or carriages at present. Frances had been tersely informed by Mr. May; but as there was ample accommodation, Mrs. Eliot could have as many of both as she chose to buy.

It occurred to her that it would be interesting if some neighboring magnate—perhaps the duke himself, who must be a judge in such matters—could be induced to advise her.

There is no railway station at Clere, a village almost as unspoiled as it must have been in the day of the Georges, when the last, most modern of its few important outlying houses were put up. Frances and Dolores Eliot, accompanied by their new maid, Parker (whom they feared, and would have liked to call Sophia) alighted therefore at Gadeshall, with many large American boxes, and found themselves obliged to take a five-mile drive.

Three large, old-fashioned cabs—all the village of Gade-shall could supply—were requisitioned for the newcomers and their belongings. And instantly the news of their arrival spread.

How this flashing far and near of the intelligence began was difficult to guess, unless Parker had dropped a few words to the railway porters who wrestled with the astonishing pile of luggage; but certain it was that within an hour it was known in the three shops of Clere and the five of Gadeshall that Lost Court had been let to a rich American lady with one daughter. Within two hours the word had been passed on from these shops—especially the Coöperative Stores which had a branch in each village—to the servants' halls of most houses within a few miles' distance, even to the mansions of the great. Ladies' maids told their mistresses; and as the

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tenants of Queen's Quadrangles had arrived about ten o'clock in the morning, their coming was discussed at more than one luncheon table.

"What—Lost Court let?" for Lost Court the place was called by high and low, within a radius of at least ten miles of Queen's Quadrangles. "Lost Court let? Americans, eh? I wonder if they know? And what will become of that poor woman? Well, no doubt she'll be happier away. Give her a chance to forget—if such things can be forgotten."

Such were the comments, with elaborations, in most houses. But meanwhile Frances and Dolores had reached the end of their five-mile drive, and were settling down after the shock of new impressions.

Some of the impressions were disappointing, though neither would have said so to the other. Only Frances did remember now that Mr. May had seemed pleased, as well as surprised, at her proposal to visit Queen's Quadrangles in the evening.

The blue and silver mystery of mingling dusk and moonlight had veiled much that was shabby and faded, as the mother and daughter realized when they came again in full sunshine, armed with the rights of possession, their contract irrevocably signed. But then, after all, thought Frances consolingly, what did it matter? She would have signed the agreement just the same, even if she had known how faded and even ragged were the beautiful old brocades and embroideries on the furniture in the large and small drawing-rooms, how disastrously worm-eaten much of the ancient oak, how past redemption many of the rare Persian rugs, how hopeless the curtains, how washed into ineffective whiteness the chintz coverings in bedrooms, and how many the spaces between portraits and pictures by old masters in the picture

gallery which was the ballroom. Rare books were gone from the bookshelves in the library, too; it was, alas! easy to guess how, once enlightened as to the failing family fortunes. Corners in the great central hall, which ought to have been filled by suits of armor, were empty; panels which had evidently been draped with tapestry were bare, and almost raw looking, compared to neighboring panels never covered. Cabinets which should have been crowded with priceless china were sparsely decked; and here and there, in some nobly appointed room, were desert spaces once occupied by some piece of furniture too fine for poverty to keep in days when all things antique are fashionable. But for Dolores, at least, the house was only the more pathetically dear for what it lacked of luxury. And even for Frances, Queen's Quadrangles was still the place she preferred beyond any other she had seen or heard of. She would have liked to buy things to fill up the most conspicuously vacant spaces, and would have enjoyed having some expensive decorator down to replace shabby velvets and brocades with new copies of the old; but though she was (temporarily) mistress of Queen's Quadrangles, she was dimly aware already that there were things she must not dare to do with it.

What rooms had been Lady Rosamund's before the beginning of the new régime Frances did not know, for a tour of inspection over the house by daylight showed no signs of occupation. All was faded, desolate, forlornly beautiful, impersonal, save for the fresh flowers, which the thoughtfulness of the new housekeeper had caused to bloom in the most habitable rooms on the two floors which constituted the whole of Queen's Quadrangles, save for enormous cellars and labyrinthine attics.

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The gardens, exquisite in design, and more than one as old as the days of Don Filipo and his Margaret, also bore testimony to family misfortunes. Two gardeners had done their best, but both were elderly, one going blind; whereas gardens and lawns were many enough and vast enough to need the constant attention of half a dozen energetic men.

Frances, seeing all the consequences of long neglect, inside and out, summoned courage for a talk with Lady Rosamund.

The late chatelaine, now housekeeper, had by permission taken up her quarters on the ground floor, in two rooms facing north-rooms as little desirable from the point of view of comfort as could be found at Queen's Quadrangles. These were the priest's room (next to the disused chapel directly on the left of the entrance-hall) and the so-called steward's room adjoining. One was to be the housekeeper's sitting room, the other her bedroom, where she would be, she had said (as if in explanation of her rather eccentric choice) conveniently near the servants' hall and kitchens. On the night of her first visit Frances had been given a glimpse of these two gloomy, deep-windowed, oak-paneled rooms, they had then been practically unfurnished. What Lady Rosamund had done to them since she did not know, and did not expect to know, for she was sure that she should never be brave enough to pay the strange housekeeper a visit in her own private quarters.

Arriving at the house soon after ten, and finishing with Dolores an inspection of the house and gardens before twelve, Frances ventured to send Soames with a request that her ladyship would kindly come for a few moments into the great hall.

Promptly, as if under orders, Lady Rosamund came.

She had already seen the newcomers that morning, having received them with a gracious, yet studiously repressed

manner, just escaping a proud humility which might have embarrassed the Americans. She had asked Mrs. Eliot at what time she wished to have her meals; had offered to show linen cupboards and other domestic store places (an offer politely waived aside); had announced her readiness to do anything which Mrs. Eliot might require of her, and had then unostentatiously vanished, believing perhaps that the mother and daughter would prefer to make their second tour of the house alone.

Now, Frances had seen everything, had begun to understand a few things, and knew better than before what directions to give, what advice to ask.

Seen in broad daylight Lady Rosamund Vane-Eliot seemed more remarkable than ever. Before, her sad beauty, her look of frozen youth might have owed something to the magic and mystery of the moonlit twilight; but prosaic noon was able to rob her of no attribute that had made her wonderful at first.

She found Mrs. Eliot sitting on a big chintz-covered sofa, which was one of the few comparatively modern objects in the hall; and that modernity was of sixty or seventy years ago. Goodness knew, as Frances said to herself, whether the sofa had been given a new cover in its whole career.

Lady Rosamund, in neat, plain black, would have stood if Frances had not impulsively jumped up and begged her to sit down, or *she* would not!

"I am your housekeeper," said the deposed mistress of Queen's Quadrangles, with a slow, sad flicker of a smile which already Frances had seen reluctantly come and go once or twice. "It's not usual for a housekeeper to sit in the presence of her employer."

"My gracious, as if you were a 'usual' housekeeper, or as if I were your employer!" cried Frances, her neat little features flushing. "I just can't stand it to live here, if you're going to talk and act like that, Lady Rosamund, and I do want to be happy in this house."

"And I want you to be happy," said the other. "It would be most ungrateful and ungracious if I did anything to make your life here difficult."

"I don't see why ungrateful," argued Frances. "You haven't any reason to be grateful to us."

"Yes, I have," said Lady Rosamund. "It was most necessary for me to let this place, and not everyone would have been willing to put up with the conditions I was obliged to exact. I know that it would be pleasanter for you, coming into this house, if I were not here—and the poor old servants whose capacities, I'm afraid, are hardly equal to their faithfulness and loyalty. But—"

"Please don't say 'but,'" broke in Frances. "I guess faithfulness and loyalty are about the best recommendations. I wouldn't wish, I wouldn't turn them out, for anything. And I understand exactly why you want to stay."

"Do you?" asked Lady Rosamund. She looked at the kindly little American woman rather searchingly.

"Why, yes. It's been your house all these years, and every stick and stone must be full of associations for you. You say you want us to be happy. Well, and we want you to be happy. One reason why I told the butler to ask if I could see you again this morning was because of that. We haven't had any sort of a talk yet, you know. Won't you—won't you please be with us—at meals and all the time—just as if we were your visitors?"

It had been hard for Frances to ask this, and deep down in her heart she did not wish it, for she vaguely felt that the position would be strained, and that she and Dolores would not be at ease if a stranger were always with them. But she wanted to do the "nice thing" by Lady Rosamund, whom she pitied and shyly admired; and her heart gave a frightened little jump when she saw the color leap up to the faded cheeks of Lady Rosamund Vane-Eliot, as if under a blow.

How young and beautiful she looked while that color lasted, so young that the snow white of her hair might have been powdered.

"Thank you; you are very kind, but that would not make me happy," the housekeeper answered. "If I can know any happiness, it is in loneliness, which has become second nature to me. I shall be glad to serve you always; but kind as you are, our lives must be lived apart. Think of me as your employee."

"If—if you're an employee, you ought to have a salary, Lady Rosamund," Frances exclaimed, trying to laugh, as though half in joke. "I think you ought to have—hundreds of dollars—or pounds, or whatever is right."

"You are paying a high rent for Queen's Quadrangles," Lady Rosamund said, "considering the dilapidations, about which perhaps I ought to have warned you that first night when it was too dark for you to judge. I didn't do it—frankly I didn't—because it meant so much to me to let the place. And I confess I have tried to let it and failed several times, though it was only lately I made up my mind to consent that the agents should advertise in a newspaper."

"You mustn't blame yourself. I'd have taken the house

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even if you'd given me a written list of all the wormholes," laughed Frances. "We're both fascinated with everything, Lolita and I, and looking forward to such a good time! I want to ask you how many servants you think we ought to keep, and how many extra gardeners we ought to get. Oh, and then—about horses and carriages!"

Lady Rosamund's face was troubled and sadder than before. "Do you think you would care for a lot of servants?" she asked. "There are only you and your daughter, I understand. With old Soames, and Bennett—who really is an exceedingly good cook, you'll find—and perhaps two young women from the village, distant relations of theirs (all these people have lived on the soil for generations, you know), and your own maid, wouldn't it be enough for indoors? As for gardeners, a coachman and groom or two——"

"Oh, but we shall perhaps have a good deal of company by and by!" cut in Frances.

"Have you many friends in this country?" Lady Rosamund's voice had an inflection not unlike controlled anxiety.

"No, none except a few American ones who might happen to be visiting England. But we shall get to know the people around the neighborhood."

Lady Rosamund did not answer, though Mrs. Eliot paused; and presently Frances went on again. "I think I should like plenty of servants, if you don't mind."

"I have no right to mind," said the other.

"And I thought of several carriages," continued Frances.

"A pony cart to potter about in, and drive ourselves, for Lolita would act like that. A—Victoria and a brougham, for weather and wet, to make calls, and maybe a motor."

Lady Rosamund turned round on one of her beautiful taper-

ing fingers her wedding ring and its guard—the only two rings she wore, and said nothing.

"Then Lolita will want to ride."

"Yes, of course," Lady Rosamund assented readily enough to that.

"And the question is, am I to engage the servants—or will you, as you know about English ways and I don't."

Lady Rosamund said that, unfortunately, of late years she had forgotten all she ever knew. She had dropped out of things. She thought that Mrs. Eliot, when she had decided how many servants she wanted—under Soames and Bennett—had better herself go to some agency in town and engage them.

"I suppose I ought to have a man to advise me. Had I better wait until some of the local people have called, or—"

"Mr. May might recommend you to some one who would know," Lady Rosamund said quickly. "I advise you not to —wait for people here, but go to him."

That then was decided. And Frances began to talk about the charms of the place, a change of subject which she thought would please the deposed mistress.

"It's quite unique," she ran on. "Those two courts! I've never been to Spain, but somehow they seem to transport me there. I do think they're beautiful. Is it true there was ever a third court?"

She was not conscious of watching Lady Rosamund as she asked this question. But suddenly she knew that she must have been, for she saw the white rose face suffused with red. The blood swept in a tide from chin to temples, and lingered; then slowly ebbed and left a pallor no longer soft

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as a faded rose petal, but sickly sallow. For a dreadful instant Frances thought that Lady Rosamund was going to faint, but after a long moment she spoke quite calmly. "A third court? Oh, I believe there is some such story. But if there ever was one, it must have been very long ago, before the memory of anyone living. Evidently the house has been almost entirely pulled to pieces and altered since those days, if another court did exist."

There was no trace of feeling in her tone which was bored rather than expressive of emotion, and Frances asked herself if the change of color were a mere coincidence which had had nothing to do with her words. Yet, when the look on Lady Rosamund's face came back to her, as it did more than once that day, she could not believe that it had meant nothing.

"There was another court once," she thought. "There must have been; and it was connected with some terrible or shameful episode in the Vane-Eliot family. Of course they had a good reason for destroying it and altering the house! I had better say nothing more to Lolita about it. Sensitive and imaginative as she is, brooding over such ideas might spoil her pleasure in the place, and that would never do."

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LADY CHILFORD'S DINNER PARTY

SEPTEMBER had come, and Lord and Lady Chilford were giving a little dinner party at Riding Wood. It was really a little dinner, not merely belittled by the modesty of host and hostess.

A great many people were in Scotland; but Lord and Lady Chilford were not rich, and could not afford Scotland, unless they visited, and they were not asked to visit at the sort of houses they liked, as often as they had been when they were younger. Besides, they were important at home, and not important anywhere else, except on the Riviera, where they had a tiny villa, and led society in a small winter town beloved by retired officers and their families.

All houses in the neighborhood of Clere, save those of the very great or smart, emptied themselves with exceeding joy in honor of even a "little dinner" at Riding Wood; and it was the same at Ramone, that pretty nest of villas and shops among the olives between Nice and Cannes. It was only those who were not invited to the dinners who sneered at them and their givers as boring and dull; who said that Lord and Lady Chilford were only able to give these entertainments (characterized as meager) or to afford a villa at Ramone, by means of intricate petty economies such as letting Riding Wood for a low rental in the winter, and the villa for a month of the high season about Easter time, when they usu-

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ally came home "because there was nothing like England in April."

The Duke of Bridgewater was a distant cousin of Lady Chilford's, and annually appeared at one or two of the dinners, though his son, Lord Tillingbourne, who liked only pretty or amusing people, seldom came when he was at home. But plenty of neighboring magnates, and especially those wishing to rank as magnates, were delighted with an invitation from Lady Chilford; for after all, an earl and countess are an earl and countess, even when poverty and age have somewhat dimmed the gold of their coronet.

Riding Wood was the sort of house which could be let (as it generally was) in winter, only because the sort of people who took it liked to say that they were stopping at "Lord and Lady Chilford's place in Surrey." The shooting, which was good, was always let also, because, as Lady Chilford said, her husband did not care about it, and she wasn't equal to big house parties. A little entertaining was all they could manage; and they enjoyed having a few friends about them.

Lady Chilford, though nearer sixty than fifty, was still living up to the past of her complexion, and the golden hair which had made her a toast in the days when its glory had not come out of a bottle. She had never had any real thoughts, but she was kind to those who did not come under her ban as "queer," and unkind to no one. She could forgive almost all things to all men, and many things to most women, except "making up," which she tolerated only in such isolated cases as herself and those at least equal to her in station.

Lord Chilford had a little body, a mind to match, and a noble profile which would have been splendid looking out of a visor. He adored his wife as the greatest beauty of present

or past days, chirped anecdotes about his and other old families, and was happy when he was asked to play the flute.

To-night, in the somewhat uninteresting drawing-room, furnished in accordance with mid-Victorian taste, were assembled Sir George and Lady Gaines of Clere Court (Sir George had made millions in tobacco, and had been knighted because of his millions, on the strength of which the loud, red-faced man and his good-natured dumpling wife were tolerated in the county); General and Mrs. Calendar—the general very tired and deaf, Mrs. Calendar delighted with herself and everything that was hers, doubtful of women she did not know, especially if they were young or good-looking, inclined to ask concerning women, "Who was she?" being unconsciously pleased if the answer were unsatisfactory; and the Reverend James Heckshaw, Vicar of Clere, with Lady Ermyntrude Heckshaw, his wife. Also there was Captain the Hon. St. John de Grey, Lady Ermyntrude's younger brother, visiting her on sick leave, and visibly bored despite the presence of the high-colored Gladys Gaines, invited for his benefit. Lady Ermyntrude's face was a mask, which ought to have expressed all the virtues, as she sincerely believed that she possessed them; but in reality it expressed nothing, whereas her brother's expressed too much. But then, he was like the other side of the family, the side which mingled French and Irish blood, and did extraordinary things.

With the hors d'œuvres, soup and fish, the talk was of the weather, of politics, and a scandal or two, decorously handled. Apropos of the scandals, perhaps, came up with the roast the subject of the Americans at Queen's Quadrangles; and so eagerly was it seized upon by all that they might have been lying in wait for the opportunity.

"Of course you haven't called, dear Lady Chilford," said Mrs. Calendar, who was, comparatively, a newcomer in the county.

"Well no, I hardly could in the circumstances," answered her hostess, in a gentle, deliberate voice. "You know—but rather, I suppose you don't know, as you've been among us for such a short time, that Lady Rosamund and I used to be quite friendly."

"I don't call four years a short time," Mrs. Calendar hastily put in.

"I mean, it was long after—everything happened. Poor Rosamund is a year or two younger than I" (eight would have been nearer the mark), "but she—well, as a girl and a young woman she was a good deal spoiled. She always was—what shall I call it?—a man's woman. I don't mean that in any—any offensive sense, of course, but she liked men better than women: she studied to please them. Then—came that awful thing—"

"You know, you are never well after thinking of it. It was a disgrace to the county."

"A real tragedy for the whole neighborhood," breathed the vicar, with a far-away look in his nice, near-sighted eyes.

"No wonder you don't like to talk about it," said Mrs. Calendar. "Still——"

"We never discuss the details. We never did," put in Lord Chilford.

"Rosamund received no one at the time," went on Lady Chilford. "That is, directly afterwards. At the very time, people kept away, for her sake. Later, most of us wrote to her. But she either never answered or answered so coldly that

one could do nothing. So, of course, even if one wished to, one couldn't possibly call on new people, staying in that house. Unless perhaps, you, Mr. Heckshaw."

"I really haven't had the courage," confessed the vicar, with his pleasant, apologetic smile. "With Lady Rosamund still in the house—she almost put me out, once, years ago. And I'm afraid you've all discovered about me, long since that, for my sins. I'm naturally shy. I struggle against it—but it constantly overpowers me, with people I feel don't want me, or with new people."

"Even with the cottagers," said Lady Ermyntrude, his wife. "The more they need it, the more difficult it is to get him to go and talk to them about their souls. Says he can't bear to force himself upon them. Really, it's absurd. I'm sure no such thoughts would ever occur to anyone but James."

"I know it's absurd," admitted the poor vicar, distressed that the conversation should remain focused so long upon himself. "But I can't help it. I wish I could."

"What sort of looking persons are these Americans who've taken Queen's Quadrangles?" asked St. John de Grey, who had arrived at the vicarage only two days ago. As he spoke, he glanced sympathetically, though with a humorous twinkle in his eyes, at the round, flushed face of his brother-in-law. The vicar was always glad when St. John came to stay. He was such a good hand at unobtrusively changing subjects when they began to get uncomfortable. He was very different from Ermyntrude, but then he was much younger. And, of course, Ermyntrude was perfect in her way, a most capable and excellent woman, if without her brother's sense of humor.

"The mother is very American, though I must say she looks really as if she might be a lady," Mrs. Calendar took upon

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herself to answer the question, as nobody else seemed in a hurry to speak.

"Why do you say, 'though'?" inquired John de Grey.

"Well, one meets—or rather sees—so many odd Americans, you know. They seem such new people. And it's so difficult to find out who they are. I'm not sure that I should have called on these, even if they'd taken some other place instead of Queen's Quadrangles."

"What about the daughter?" went on De Grey. "Does she come under the same category?"

"Oh, she's pretty," admitted Mrs. Calendar. "At least I suppose she'd be called pretty, though her eyes are really too big for her face. Don't you think so, Lady Ermyntrude?"

"I've never happened to see either the mother or daughter, except in church. And, of course, one doesn't look at people in church," said Lady Ermyntrude. She had married Mr. Heckshaw because she had thought that she could convert him to high-church opinions and usages, but he had been a disappointment to her in more ways than one. However, even the daughter of an earl must not expect too much in life, if her hair is thin, her nose large, and her dower small.

"Oh, they do go to church, then?" remarked St. John.

"Yes," said his sister, looking particularly expressionless. "They come to church."

"By Jove, I do think you and Jim are brave not to call on them!"

"We'd have been brave to go," groaned poor Mr. Heck-shaw.

"There's no question of bravery," Lady Ermyntrude reproved him. "It is simply impossible that either of us should

go there to that house. I'm sure they couldn't expect it, even of James, as the vicar."

"I'm not perfectly sure that they don't, or rather that they didn't at first," said Lady Chilford. "I have an idea they must have taken the Quadrangles without knowing."

"Then it's jolly hard lines on them to come into a place and wake to find themselves pariahs," said De Grey.

"It may be hard, and we may feel pity for them," replied his sister. "But in the circumstances we cannot help them. People oughtn't to take houses without finding out all about them beforehand."

"One asks questions about drainage and things like that, but it would hardly occur to one to inquire whether there are any tragedies running loose about the house," said her brother.

"It's not our fault if they were careless."

"Don't make us more miserable about these people than we are already, St. John," implored the vicar.

"I am not miserable. I feel that I am in the right," retorted Lady Ermyntrude. "When one says that, one says everything."

She looked slowly round, as if challenging contradiction, but no one answered.

The tenants of Queen's Quadrangles were condemned.

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THE GREEN TUNNEL

RANCES and Dolores Eliot were pariahs, but they were not unhappy. Who could be unhappy at a place so glorious as Queen's Quadrangles? Not such lovers of beauty as the Eliots, mother and daughter. Nevertheless, it was a disappointment, a blank, bitter disappointment to Frances that no one should call upon her. And she could not understand it at all.

At first, she had been lost in the passionate enjoyment of "settling in," and she had been glad that people were considerate enough to wait until that process was satisfactorily finished.

Timidly she had asked Lady Rosamund's permission to have some of the shabbiest furniture coverings and hangings removed in favor of new ones to be paid for by herself; and Lady Rosamund had said that, as she had taken the house for a term of years, she must consider herself free to do what would make her feel most at home. So Frances had had the delight of choosing copies of old damasks and brocades; though to be accurate, it was Dolores who chose, and she who agreed to the choice; the child had such a wonderful eye for color and harmoniousness. Horses and carriages had to be provided, too, and new servants got for outdoors and in. Altogether, there was a fortnight of delicious excitement, during

which Frances missed nothing, but then—came a period of waiting and doubt.

The first Sunday, Frances did not go to church, or let Dolores go. They were tired after a hard though pleasurable week of work, and Frances secretly wished to be looking her best when the eyes of the county and the neighborhood first fell upon her. Besides, with a kind of innocent vanity, she enjoyed the thought of the disappointment which would surely be felt when the people, who must have been eagerly expecting to see what the newcomers were like, found that their curiosity was not to be immediately satisfied.

The next Sunday they did go, however, sitting in the pew which had belonged for many generations to the Vane-Eliots of Queen's Quadrangles. It was theirs by right now, and all Frances's pride in her husband's race was satisfied as she and Dolores reposed in it alone. Of course, she had asked Lady Rosamund to "please sit there just as usual," but Lady Rosamund quietly answered that of late she did not go to church. And perhaps Frances had not been sorry, for she was never quite at ease with Lady Rosamund, she could not have told why.

After that Sunday, Mrs. Eliot made excuses to do her driving or motoring or walking in the morning, that she might be at home to receive visitors, and she was critical about which of many white muslin dresses Dolores should wear. But no visitors appeared, and on the third Sunday in church the faces which had so interested her as being those of possible friends seemed to look hard and cold, the eyes to gaze through rather than at her, if hers inadvertently turned to question them.

From doubt and wonder Frances Eliot's feeling became

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pique. She tried not to care that all these people should ignore her and Dolores, as if they were creatures beneath notice; but the more she tried, the more she did care. She dreamed of her disappointment at night, and rankled under it by day, though she was too proud to speak of it to Lady Rosamund, whom she seldom saw unless by request, or when, in the capacity of housekeeper, the deposed sovereign asked the reigning queen if there were any special orders.

Once or twice Frances was minded to say: "Isn't it the custom in this part of the country to call on new arrivals?" but in her shy, hurt pride she dreaded the change that might flit over Lady Rosamund's face—a look which would tell her that, for some reason, she was not considered desirable, even though the lips courteously alleged other reasons. So she did not speak, and never guessed that part of the sadness in Lady Rosamund's eyes meant pity for her and a guilty conscience for having kept silence as to things which might well have prevented any tenant from coming to Queen's Quadrangles.

Still, Frances was not utterly cast down. She began so to love Queen's Quadrangles that she said to herself, even if she had known how horrid and unsociable everyone was going to be, she would have taken the dear place just the same. And then, it was so good that people's lack of politeness did not affect Dolores's spirits.

Most girls of nineteen, Frances reflected, would have been deadly dull without any young men in their lives, or any dances, or even so much as an occasional game of tennis. But Dolores did not seem even to be aware that she was missing anything. She spent hours in the gardens, or in the fountain court, which she loved, listening to the trickle of falling water, and watching the changing fire of sunset, or the sil-

very moonlight turn the blowing plumes of spray to ruby or pearl.

Dolores loved the lake, too, and the terraces where the haughty peacocks walked, and the old, old yew arbors, and the Italian pergolas curtained with roses. She asked Frances to buy her a canoe, and it gave her mother a wistful kind of pleasure to see the girl's grace as she manipulated it in the clear sheet of water where reflections were as real as realities—wistful, because of her own vanishing youth, and because Dolores seemed to her so beautiful that she could scarcely bear to have no one else to see her thus.

There was the library, too; and on rainy days Dolores could scarcely be persuaded to come out of the noble old room with its rows upon rows of wonderful books, its high-carved ceiling, and its great latticed windows with deep, cushioned seats. The girl appeared to forget that her mother had counted upon entertaining the neighborhood and on being entertained by it in return; or if she did not forget, neither did she repine that English customs were apparently different from what they had supposed. She was perfectly happy, bathed in the enchantment of romance and poetry which made music for her in every corner of the old house and stately gardens; and seeing her so radiant Frances could not be miserable.

This was the state of things at Queen's Quadrangles at the time of Lady Chilford's dinner party, when the Eliots had been in Surrey for a month. But Dolores, at least, was not quite without friends. She was on the best of terms with several children who smiled at her from inside cottage gates, as she walked to the village, which she loved to do for the sake of exercise, and for the joy of coming back to Queen's Quad-

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rangles after a short absence. Also she had scraped acquaintance with a fascinating old hero of the Crimea who sat, covered with medals and gnarled with rheumatism, always on
the same seat, under a huge oak on the village green; and
she had often a pleasant chat with Mrs. Still, who kept the
post office. The old soldier and the postmistress were very
agreeable persons, with respectful manners which struck the
American girl as extraordinary in people of their class; but
she thought it rather odd that they invariably became reserved, or changed the subject if she happened to mention
Queen's Quadranges. Perhaps—it occurred to her one day—
this was because the people of the neighborhood resented foreigners living in a house which had for so long been the home
of an old family, known to everyone.

This idea depressed her a little, and she was not half as happy as she had been a few minutes ago, about the dolls she had just bought for the two cottage children.

It was beginning to rain, and she had no umbrella, for the sun had been shining when she started. From a few heavy drops it soon became a downpour, and as she was already half a mile out of the village, with quite half a mile to go still before reaching her little friends' cottage, Dolores took shelter under a big beech tree.

This was not the main road, but a short cut between the cottages, and also to one of the gates at Queen's Quadrangles. Indeed, it was more like a lane than a road, so narrow was the winding way, hollowed out between high banks, green with bracken and starred with tiny pink and blue wild flowers. So vastly generous were the beeches and chestnuts interweaving their branches overhead that the road was like a tunnel cut out of greenery and filled with a mysterious light that might

have filtered through emeralds. There was not much danger of getting wet in that green tunnel, but at the top of the hill the road opened out between meadows, so Dolores made up her mind to wait in safety where she was. The sound of the rain on the thick leaves far above her head was as the tinkling fall of crystal beads, and as she looked up it was like looking up to the dome of a vast, green-roofed temple. The rain brought out delicious scents of clover and new-cut grass, and the bitter-sweet smell of bracken. Above, the birds called cozily to each other from nests sheltered under leaves, and Dolores, with lifted chin, could see their family life going on, undisturbed by her presence.

"At least," she said to herself, "the birds don't hate me, or mind my being here. They don't think of me as a 'for-eigner."

As she stood, gathering together her frilly white muslin, she was almost opposite the gate of a quaint cottage house which she had always admired when she passed this way. It was of brick, well-mellowed by age, with lovely pinks and grays, and purples, and it had black oak beams which divided the walls into squares. There was a porch of oak rather like the porch of an old country church, with a seat on either side, and over its pointed gable poured cascades of white and purple clematis, tangled inextricably with honeysuckle. The dainty white muslin curtains in the diamond-paned windows, the charmingly kept lawn shaded by ancient yews and a copper beech or two, the hydrangeas in tubs where the old brick path mounted in two steps toward the house, all seemed to show that the cottage was occupied by gentlefolk; and once or twice as Dolores passed, she had caught through the rose-bowered arch of the rustic gateway glimpses of two little old ladies

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in mushroom hats, flitting about with garden scissors. The lawn and garden were deserted now, and the tall lilies were trembling under the onslaught of crystal spears of rain. On one of the porch seats, cuddled well under shelter, sat a large black Persian cat whose eyes, yellow and round as gold sovereigns set in ebony, stared uncompromisingly from a distance at the white figure of the girl just visible through the gate. Then suddenly, patter, patter, along the shady road came a sopping wet spaniel, who ran to the closed gate and peered in at the cat, shaking off raindrops and wagging his wet tail.

The cat sprang up and arched its back, while the dog pushed with his long nose against the gate. The latch, it seemed, was not firmly fastened, and dreading tragedy, Dolores hastily called the spaniel, at the same time starting forward to catch him by the collar should he pay no heed.

But she need not have feared his neglect. At the sound of her voice the dog instantly turned, and running toward her would have signified extreme delight in making her acquaintance, by jumping with muddy forepaws upon her dress, if a peremptory whistle had not reduced him to abject apology.

Dolores looked round, and saw a young man walking quickly toward her along the green tunnel. At sight of her, with the abashed dog waggling at her feet, he took off his hat, walking more briskly.

"I do hope Toddles hasn't pawed you, and muddied your frock," he said, looking at the face of the girl and not at the frock.

"Oh, no, and if he had, it wouldn't have mattered. He's a dear fellow," replied Dolores, with her pleasant American frankness. The nice voice and clear-featured, though not

handsome face, told her that the man was a gentleman. "I think it's very kind of your dog to want to make friends with me."

St. John de Grey thought the wish did credit to the animal's intelligence. This was the first time he had seen Dolores (it was only two days after the Chilford dinner), but he was sure from Mrs. Calendar's description that she must be the American girl whose mother had taken Queen's Quadrangles. She was so-almost pathetically pretty, he said to himself, after hesitating for an adjective, that no wonder even that dry-as-dust woman had been forced to pay the lovely young creature grudging tribute. As for her eyes, they certainly were very large, but not at all too large, as Mrs. Calendar had said. They were, on the contrary, exactly right; and seen in this green twilight under the trees they had the most extraordinary luminous effect, as they looked up to him out of the pearl-pale face—those great dark eyes, soft as a fawn's. He would have liked to shake his sister, and all the other women. Suddenly he had a very strong, almost violent desire to do something kind for this girl, something that she would remember. He was nearly thirty, and he had met a great many pretty girls, many of whom had been rather too nice to him for his own good; but-prepared already perhaps by the talk at the dinner-table—he was moved in a moment to a romantically chivalrous impulse toward this young slip of a thing in white muslin.

"You've no umbrella," he remarked with more of solicitude than originality.

"Neither have you," Dolores smiled.

"That doesn't matter—any more than for Toddles. Besides, I'm going to Turk's Cottage, to a tea-party given es-

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pecially for me. Of course you must know Miss Greenleaf and Miss Peachy?"

- "No," said Dolores.
- "Then you ought to."

She smiled again. And when she smiled a little round dimple came in each of the cheeks, which were faintly pink now.

- "Ought I? But it doesn't seem for me to choose."
- "Oh, yes, it is," insisted De Grey, with sudden inspiration.
- "Everybody knows Miss Greenleaf and Miss Peachy."
 - "What nice names!" said Dolores evasively.
- "Just right for their owners. They're twins, you see, and as alike as two sweet peas. Look here, they'd be miserable if they knew you were outside getting soaked. Do come in and shelter in their house till the rain's over. They'll be delighted to have you. And, anyhow, it's my tea-party. Ever since I used to visit them as a young savage from Eton, they've always allowed me to invite my own guests."
- "But I'm not getting soaked," the girl assured him. "I like being here. It's lovely. Please go in and don't mind about me. In a few minutes the rain will stop."
- "I'll go in, but Miss Greenleaf will certainly send out to beg you to come in when she hears—"
 - "Don't tell her!" Dolores begged.
- "I can't promise that," said De Grey, opening the gate, while Toddles, following slowly, looked an apology to his new friend.

THE LITTLE LADIES OF TURK'S COTTAGE

OLORES tried to hope that nothing of what the man prophesied would happen; and she even thought of hurrying away, rather than that the ladies of Turk's Cottage should feel constrained to invite her in. But it really was raining very hard now. Beyond the green tunnel the glittering downpour was like a waving screen of spun glass. And she thought of the two trim little figures she had seen flitting about the garden. It would be nice to know what kind of faces the big mushroom hats had hidden. "Miss Greenleaf and Miss Peachy!" Ladies with names as quaint as that couldn't be stiff, English creatures with cold-boiled-gooseberry eyes and formidable stick-out teeth, like some middle-aged women she had noticed at church, or driving in and out of the village.

Dolores saw the young man rescue the black cat from Tod-dles's excited advances, by lifting it to his shoulder. She saw him order the spaniel to lie down in the porch; and then she heard the distant tapping of the old iron knocker on the black oak door. Almost instantly the door was thrown open; and three minutes had not passed after the young man's disappearance into the house when he appeared again putting up an umbrella over the neatly capped head of a little old lady. He tried to shelter his companion down the brick path which led to the gate, but she stepped briskly ahead of him and out into the road.

"My dear child!" she exclaimed. "The idea of your standing here in the wet, instead of running into our house. What do you mean by it? Now, come in and have some tea. I'm Miss Greenleaf, Poppy Greenleaf."

She took Dolores by the hand with her little old one, that was still fine and pretty, and led the girl, unresisting, under the rustic arch where late roses dripped perfumed raindrops on faces and lashes.

On the other side of the door, Dolores could not help crying out with delight. They entered a low, square hall or living room, with great rough beams of oak running across the ceiling and plastered wall. At the back was a stairway and a glass door that opened onto a lawn under laden apple trees. There was a huge red-bricked fireplace, with brass warming pans hanging inside; and close to an old-fashioned settle was drawn a little gate-legged table with a tea tray on it. On the tray was some dainty old silver, and teacups of willowpattern ware. In a corner stood a big grandfather clock with a half moon peering over the white top of its face; and there were old portraits, old china, and old easy chairs covered with faded, pretty old chintz. In the hall, though the windows were open to the fresh air, there was a scent of lavender and of potpourri, mingling deliciously with a vague, spicy smell as if from an adjacent store cupboard.

"This is my sister Peachy," announced Miss Greenleaf, as another little old lady who had been hovering near the door came smilingly yet timidly forward. "She didn't dare to run and fetch you in, though she would have liked to. I'm the brave one of this family. Dear me, I'm sure I don't know what Peachy and her little maid Lauretta—we have but one—would do if I weren't as brave as I am! Now, sit down and

drink some hot tea, my dear. Peachy was just going to make it. I always let her make the tea, both for breakfast and in the afternoon. That's my way of showing my superiority of age. Quite ten minutes. I believe it was, though *she* tries to make it out eight, whenever she wants to lord it over me."

It was true that they were "alike as two sweet peas," these elderly twins, these little creatures as dainty as their Queen Anne silver, as prettily faded as their own chintz, and bits of decorative brocade on shelf and table. The only perceptible difference was, that Miss Poppy wore a cap and gold-rimmed spectacles, while Miss Peachy's white hair was adorned by a mere rosette of lace and ribbon, and she had smart eyeglasses which pinched her little nose. Perhaps, too, Miss Peachy had a fresher color than her sister, a true, peachy bloom which made her name appropriate, while Miss Poppy's soft cheeks had only a little, deep-pink stain on either cheek bone, as if a sharp tap had been bestowed on each. Both sisters had faded, forget-me-not blue eyes, Miss Poppy's with a quiet gleam of humor which now and then turned them steel gray behind their spectacles; Miss Peachy's with a gentle, childlike outlook on life, a lingering of youth's romantic dreams, never fulfilled.

Dolores's heart went out to the two at once, and she wished that she might kiss them. She thought that, if she wanted advice, she would like best to seek Miss Poppy; if she wanted sympathy, she would rather run to Miss Peachy.

"How kind you are!" she exclaimed, feeling suddenly gay and light-hearted, as if she had come home to friends after a long absence. "Why, you don't even know who I am, and yet you've invited me to tea!"

"We do know who you are. That is, we know from Captain

de Grey that you come from—we know where you live," said Miss Poppy.

"But we should have wanted to invite you to tea just the same, if we didn't know," put in Miss Peachy warmly. "We're so pleased to have you. We've often seen you go past, and wished we might ask you to drop in and chat with us."

"Though, when we come to think of it, why should a young thing like you care to be bothered chatting with old things like us?" her eldest sister cut her short.

Miss Peachy tossed her neat little head under its smart rosette of ribbon, and pursed her pink lips, as much as to say "Speak for yourself, my dear." That made Miss Poppy laugh, and hint mischievously that perhaps now and then Peachy wished there had been fifteen minutes' difference between them, instead of ten. Then they gave each other's pretty old hands little patting slaps, and Miss Peachy poured boiling water into the Queen Anne teapot which instantly sent forth a delicious fragrance.

"My dear sir," said Miss Poppy to the young man, with all the politeness of a female Boswell to a Johnson, "My dear sir, have the obligingness to ring the bell, and Lauretta will bring in the hot tea cakes."

"When are you going to begin calling me St. John?" asked her guest as he sprang up to obey her bidding. "You've known me for over fourteen years."

"Indeed, we wouldn't be so wanting in respect to one of his Majesty's officers, and such a distinguished one at that," both sisters answered together, almost in a breath. Already Dolores began to see that the likeness in their features extended to their thoughts, although Miss Poppy felt bound to keep up the dignity of the elder sister.

"Even though you knew me first when I was in an Eton jacket?"

"Even then, you were already the brother-in-law of the vicar."

St. John de Grey burst out laughing. "Miss Poppy, you're the most obstinate woman alive," he said. "But anyhow, in a way you've introduced me to—to—"

Miss Peachy gave a little girlish giggle, as if taken with the romance of the situation, "Dear me, I suppose neither of you know the other's name yet?" she exclaimed. "And now I come to think of it, neither do we know—"

- "My name is Dolores Eliot," said the girl.
- "Eliot!" the two sisters looked at each other.
- "Then you are—" went on Miss Peachy impulsively, but Miss Poppy checked her with a glance.

Dolores guessed what the little lady had been on the point of saying, and did not see why she might not answer the broken question.

"Related to Lady Rosamund Vane-Eliot?" she asked. "We don't know. My father was English, though he lived in America for many years; long before I was born, even; and that was one reason why mother and I wanted to come and stay over here; father used to talk so much about England. But when we took it, we didn't know that Queen's Quadrangles belonged to people with a name like ours. It was only a coincidence; and we haven't found out since whether the families were related, though we should like to, of course."

"Yes—very interesting, but here comes Lauretta with the tea cakes," said Miss Poppy hastily. Then both sisters fussed about the arrangement of plates with thin bread and butter, and plum cake (such as schoolboys love) to make room for

the covered dish brought in by a becapped maid, who looked as if born especially to wait upon such mistresses. She was plump and rosy, with a face shining with soap, and everything she had on rattled with starch as she walked. She smiled modestly, and ducked a curtsey to Captain the Hon. St. John de Grey, when she had safely set down the tea cakes, then shot shyly out of the room with a rustle as of autumn leaves.

Hardly had she gone when there was a sound of trotting hoofs that stopped at the gate two dozen yards away; and St. John, with the silver cover of the tea cake dish in his hand, peeped with the guilty curiosity of a schoolboy between the half-drawn muslin curtains.

- "It's Mrs. Calendar," he announced, with a falling face.

 "In the midst of my tea party! Can't you be out?"
- "Oh, no, we couldn't, I'm afraid," piped the sisters, their merriment gone. "It wouldn't be safe. Besides, here we are, in the hall."
 - "Let's bolt into the kitchen," proposed St. John.
- "There'd be the tea things to betray us—and our cups full, too," said Miss Peachy, tempted, yet resisting.
- "Her footman is knocking. It's too late to do anything now, even if we would," sighed Miss Poppy. And Dolores, seeing the flutter of dismay in the dovecote, was disconcerted in sympathy.

Lauretta heard the summons, and popped in again, to answer the door. But the smart servant could see for himself that the ladies were at home; and in another moment a stately figure was being obsequiously led up the path under an umbrella of precisely the right size to shelter the mistress and drip on the footman's respectful shoulder.

With an air of gracious condescension which Dolores felt by a quick instinct, the visitor sailed into the cottage room and seemed immediately to dwarf it. She was handsomely dressed, though without much taste or any distinction. Her drab hair was done after the fashion most approved by English royalties; but the kindly manner of royalty was not grand enough for the lady's imitation. Her smile, her handshake, patronized Miss Greenleaf and Miss Peachy in turn, and the change in her voice when addressing De Grey in the friendly tone of an equal, emphasized her condescension to her hostesses, as she no doubt intended. Last of all, as she accepted a chair, she looked at Dolores through the lorgnettes for which the near-sightedness of her prominent eyes offered some excuse.

She would drink no tea, thanks, she said. Having just come from calling on dear Lady Chilford, and passing this way in her carriage she thought she would stop; but really it must be only for a moment. How glad she was to see Captain de Grey! Had he heard that Lord Tillingbourne was expected back home soon, on leave? Lady Chilford had had the news from the dear duke. Such a charming young man, Lord Tillingbourne, though not literary, like his father. Didn't Captain de Grey think him fascinating? Quite an ornament to the Life Guards.

"To tell the truth, I've always thought him rather a young beast," replied St. John calmly.

Mrs. Calendar looked surprised and a little shocked. In the bright lexicon of her youth, and the dull one of her middle age, there was no such word as beast in connection with the heir to a dukedom. But Captain de Grey was the younger son of an earl, and though poor, still not a person to be vexed

with, so she laughed; and then, in the slight pause which followed, gazed again at Dolores through her lorgnettes.

"I'm so near-sighted," she said, "and the room is—er—a little dark, owing to its—er—quite delightfully quaint low ceiling, therefore I'm not sure if I've failed to recognize some acquaintance—a pupil of yours, perhaps, Miss Peachy?"

"Miss Peachy has given up taking pupils and retired on her laurels these five years—before you came into this part of the world, Mrs. Calendar," said St. John, who knew well that the lady's short sight and short memory were both partly assumed when convenient. She recognized the girl, he had no doubt, for had she not already described the fair face, with the great dark eyes which in her opinion were too big for it?

"Oh—er, of course—how stupid of me," murmured Mrs. Calendar.

"This is Miss Eliot, who is, I hope, going to be a friend of ours," said Miss Poppy, a steely twinkle of amusement behind her glasses. She understood perfectly that Mrs. Calendar, rich and self-important, a newcomer in an old neighborhood, patronized her and her sister with conscious virtue. The woman really thought that she was particularly nice to call in a friendly way on pecple who lived in a cottage not much better than an abode for peasants. But Miss Poppy's sense of humor and Miss Peachy's childlike gentleness preserved them from resentment. It rather amused Miss Poppy that Mrs. Calendar should be so pleased with the gorgeous new suites of furniture from Waring's & Maple's in her own fine new house, as to despise their Cromwellian and Jacobean treasures, their cottage as old as the Crusaders.

"Miss Eliot?" repeated Mrs. Calendar. "Ah, I—er—I don't think, after all, that——"

"I live at Queen's Quadrangles," said Dolores simply. But she waited with half-shy interest to see whether this lady with the lorgnettes and important-looking teeth would instantly turn from the subject, as everybody else seemed to do, even the Miss Greenleafs.

Mrs. Calendar, however, showed no such desire: rather the contrary, though she had no intention of betraying openly an emotion so vulgar as curiosity.

"Indeed? We heard that the place was let," she remarked, her pale eyes brightening a little. "You must find it dreadfully dull there."

"Oh, no!" cried Dolores. "We never think of being dull. It is so beautiful. I am happy all day long."

"What about the nights?" suggested Mrs. Calendar, still making use of her lorgnettes. "I should think you would be terrified. I'm sure I should be, to sleep in that house."

"Why?" asked the girl, her eyes wide with surprise.

"Of course, one doesn't exactly believe in ghosts, but-"

"Mrs. Calendar, do change your mind and take some tea. Is it two lumps of sugar or only one? I'm ashamed of myself not to remember," broke in Miss Greenleaf.

"No tea, thank you. But, as I was saying, there must really be something odd about Queen's Quadrangles. I suppose you've never seen or heard——"

"This is the cake that Miss Poppy always has made especially for me, when I write her that I'm coming down to Clere," said St. John, handing a plate. "I recommend it."

"Thanks, no cake-nothing at all."

"Do you mean that Queen's Quadrangles is supposed to be haunted?" asked Dolores. "I should like that, for I'm sure there would be only handsome, polite ghosts about the house

if they were family ones and looked like the portraits. I don't think I should be at all afraid to meet one."

"I should be afraid to say that, if I were you, for fear of a judgment," said Mrs. Calendar. "I don't know what the family ghosts at Queen's Quadrangles may have been like in the past, but those of the present day are hardly——"

"We have a ghost ourselves," Miss Peachy ventured to interrupt, all in a flutter. "The ghost of the Turk, you know. I dare say Miss Eliot hasn't heard that this cottage is named after a Turk who came over as a servant with a Sir Somebody Vane, a great traveler? He gave the man this cottage when he retired."

"I'm afraid I should resent a servant's ghost making free of my house," remarked Mrs. Calendar. "Such a liberty! But tell me, Miss—er—Eliot, in your explorations have you ever come across any trace of the Lost Court?"

"No," said Dolores. "I don't believe there ever was another court. Or if there was, the whole house must have been altered entirely since. It's all made in exact proportion, as if to fit the only two there are now—the cypress court and the fountain court."

"Well, at any rate, there must be something very queer about the place, apart from its—er—misfortunes." Mrs. Calendar persisted: "Of course, I've never been there. My husband and I only built our house about four years ago. But my maid is a distant relation of the old housekeeper at Queen's Quadrangles, and I believe goes to see her sometimes, though from all I can understand, she doesn't seem to get a particularly warm welcome. However, she gains the impression of mystery. I should say, at least, that the house is simply honeycombed with secret rooms and passages. If I were you,

Miss Eliot, I should be careful that there was nothing of the sort opening out of my room. That would be disagreeable!"

"I'm not afraid!" laughed Dolores. "I only wish there were such things. I'd give anything to find a secret door somewhere, perhaps with a wonderful story about it. Perhaps I shall ask Lady Rosamund some day to tell me if there are any very exciting old family histories."

"Oh, my dear, I wouldn't—I wouldn't ask her that!" cried Miss Peachy.

"Miss Eliot doesn't mean it, sister," said Miss Poppy. "She is only joking."

Dolores flushed faintly, and St. John de Grey thought her even prettier with a bright color than she had been when snowdrop pale in the green light of the tunnel under the trees. The girl had not been joking. On hearing Mrs. Calendar's vague hints, her impulse had been to go straight to Lady Rosamund, with whom she felt little of that shy restraint which oppressed Frances. Lady Rosamund, whenever they met—which was not often—was always very kind and gentle with her. Perhaps she understood that the girl admired her intensely, and as it was a long time since she had known the sweet incense of strangers' admiration, it might be that she had a warm place in her heart for this young tenant of hers, whose large eyes lingered upon her face as if it were a beautiful picture.

Dolores really had thought that she might ask Lady Rosamund for old stories of Queen's Quadrangles, and had even fancied Lady Rosamund might enjoy telling them, as it was evident that her whole heart was centered in the place. Otherwise, why did she stay on there in such an unsuitable, subordinate position? The girl had not heard her mother question

Lady Rosamund about the lost court, and though Frances had more than once remembered the look on her strange housekeeper's face, she had been true to her resolution not to mention the little episode to Dolores.

Now, when gentle Miss Peachy made her quick protest, the girl felt ashamed, as if she had suggested doing something in bad taste, and she was vexed with herself for not being delicate-minded enough to recognize this bad taste, without having it thus impressed upon her.

"I won't say anything to Lady Rosamund," she assured Miss Greenleaf and Miss Peachy. And then, the rain being over, she rose to go.

"Thank you both so very much for having me," she said childishly, shaking hands first with one and then with the other.

In one breath, as was their way of talking, the two old ladies impressed upon her the pleasure they had felt, and hoped that she would find time to "drop in" on them whenever she was passing.

"I should love to," said Dolores. Then, hesitating a little—"And—and my mother. She would so like to know you, I'm sure. Could you—would you mind the trouble of coming to see her some day?"

Both Miss Greenleaf and Miss Peachy grew pink to the roots of their white hair. "We—we are so very sorry," they faltered, "but it's a long way for us. We're not young, you know, and——"

"But mother would send the motor or a carriage for you, whichever you liked," pleaded Dolores eagerly. "And you would come to tea. We'd have it in the long pergola, or in the fountain court—"

"Dear child," said Miss Greenleaf, lowering her voice as she led the girl toward the door, "indeed, indeed we should have been delighted, if it had been possible, but it isn't—it isn't. Only, if you think Mrs. Eliot would come to us, I would with so much pleasure write a note and invite her. But we are two very unimportant little women. She mightn't care to be bothered with us."

Dolores, vaguely saddened and puzzled, protested against this idea, and at last, after bidding Mrs. Calendar a polite good-by, got out of the room. St. John de Grey went with her to open the gate, the latch of which, he announced, was very stiff.

"Do you think Mrs. Eliot would let me call on her?" he asked.

Dolores looked up at him with a frank gaze. "Of course she would be pleased. But—" the girl hesitated—"I wish you would tell me something. Is everyone about here prejudiced against Americans?"

St. John hastened to reply that there was no feeling of that sort—quite the contrary, indeed.

"Then—is it that they don't like strange, new people coming to live in a dear old place like Queen's Quadrangles? Even the Miss Greenleafs, you see—"

"No, no, I don't see, for it isn't at all as you seem to think," the young man broke in, touched as well as flattered at this sign of confidence in him. "I know what's in your thoughts. But it isn't your being Americans or strangers that keeps people away. It's—it's—"

[&]quot;Please explain to me what. You can't stop now."

[&]quot;Why, it's the house," said St. John.

[&]quot;The house?"

"Really, I'm afraid I can't explain any more. Only, if you'd taken any other house, it would—it would be altogether different."

Dolores flushed, as if she had heard an unkind word spoken of some friend. "I'd rather have that dear house than all the new acquaintances in the world," she said proudly. "I shan't mind now, even for mother's sake, who comes or stops away. Good-by. And thank you for—opening the gate."

Then she was gone, leaving St. John de Grey looking after her.

"I don't care," he said to himself. "I will go. And so shall Jim—and Ermyntrude, too."

CHAPTER NINE

THE MAN IN THE GONDOLA

OST young girls, unless they are in love, fall asleep when they go to bed and wake up when they are called. But Dolores Eliot often had wakeful hours. Thoughts visited her at night which never came at any other time. She had only to leave the door of her mind open and in they trooped, more beautiful and wonderful than any dream. She could not have told these fancies to anybody she had ever seen yet, not even to her mother; but now and then she had a dim longing for some one who might have the same kind of thoughts.

Such a some one seemed possible only when imagined by night, in still, sweet hours when you had but to wish for a thing to make it credible.

The night after Dolores's visit to Turk's Cottage the weather had cleared after the showers, and the moon rode among a few high, white clouds. Until now, each night of this second moon since the Eliots had known Queen's Quadrangles the sky had been overcast, and Dolores had been cheated of that vision of mysterious beauty which was her first memory of the place. She had been waiting for it, hoping for it, and now it had come.

Her mother and she had bidden each other good-night at ten o'clock, and no doubt half an hour later Frances was in bed, the white glory of the night carefully shut out by drawn

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window curtains lest the moon, staring in, should give wild dreams. But Dolores, who never needed or wished for a maid's services at night, curled herself up in a deep window seat as soon as she had slipped on a wrapper and shaken down the thick dark veil of her hair over her shoulders.

She had put out the lamp, and the two long candles in old silver candlesticks, which lighted her dressing-table; but the evening had been cool, and a log or two of wood glowed cozily in the deep fireplace. The girl felt a sensuous pleasure in the picture of which she was the central figure. Not in the whole world could there be one more beautiful, she thought, so it was a great privilege to be in it; and she was glad to think that she was pretty, too. Not to be pretty would be to make a jarring note, and Dolores could not bear jarring notes.

Curled up among cushions in the window seat she could see a dim reflection of herself in a long mirror across the room: a slim white thing, dreamlike, with a shadow cloak of dark hair, and eyes that gleamed when the logs in the fireplace gave out a sudden flame.

Rose red flashed wavering gleams on the white and black of the oak-beamed walls and ceiling, when that flame burned; while outside the open windows the landscape, bathed in floods of moonlight, was a pale, silvered lilac in contrast to the glow within.

Dolores had chosen her corner in the window seat so that she could see the lake, luminous as a mirror, laid on a cushion of purple velvet. She wished that she had the courage to steal downstairs in her warm dressing gown of white cashmere, unfasten the canoe, and go out on the water. It would be a wonderful experience, and one that she could never forget.

The only danger would be that by opening some door or

window she might wake some one who would raise a silly alarm. That would be ignominious; but if she were very careful to make no noise it was not likely that she would be heard. It was eleven o'clock now, and everybody in the great house was in bed and asleep, except perhaps Lady Rosamund, who often looked as if she passed wakeful nights. But luckily, Lady Rosamund's windows did not look out on the lake.

The idea of the poetic adventure she was planning for herself began to fascinate Dolores. From where she sat she could see, gleaming pure white beneath the moon, a terrace of marble with steps going down to the lake. Under this terrace that had marble columns for supports—columns that glistened elusively through crystal depths of water—the new canoe was moored, and a poor, battered old Venetian gondola which had once been brave with carving of black and gold.

It seemed now to Dolores, as she gazed through the bright haze of moonlight, that she could see the fantastic prow of this gondola, blacker than the shadows which lurked beneath the marble terrace. Curiously enough, the dark shape seemed to stir, though there was no wind to break the clear mirror of the lake. Surprised, the girl turned her whole attention to the moving shadow, and could scarcely believe her eyes when the gondola suddenly swam out into full moonlight.

In it was a standing figure, tall, slender, and graceful, as it dipped the long-handled oar; the figure of a man cut clear and black as a silhouette against the silver sheen of sky and water.

Dolores, leaning out, half believed she must be dreaming, and that if she could wake up, she would find herself lying in bed. Still, what a vivid dream it was! How sure she felt that she was wide awake, watching a real gondola propelled by a

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real gondolier across a wide expanse of moonlit lake. How perfect was every detail of the domain, down to the silver line drawn round the moving boat, and the scattered pearls which the oar strewed behind it. Yet she had known other dreams almost as real, from which she had waked up, dreams in the midst of which she had said to herself, "This time I must be awake, and the strange thing I see is happening."

Quick as the lightning of Excalibur itself, flashed in her mind remembrance of a great poem, "The Passing of Arthur." She thought of the king rowing out across the bosom of the mere, to take the sword held to him by an arm clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful. Almost she expected to see rise that arm, brandishing a thing that gleamed; almost she expected to see that tall figure, in the dusky barge "dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stem," bend and draw up the magic brand. Then, even as she looked, the long black shape of the gondola glided into the deep shadow that margined the sheet of water. If her eyes had not closely followed that shape in all its journey out of light into darkness, they could scarcely have separated it from the dusk which had swallowed it up; but, knowing the thing was there behind the veil of shadow, she could trace it as it moved, until at last the black blot it made was gone behind an island which grew up near the farthest shore.

Dolores had forgotten, in watching the gondola, all about her wish to slip out of doors and paddle about on the lake in the moonlight. As the dark shape disappeared, she remembered, but she no longer had any desire to go. She slid down from the window seat, however, and began walking about the room. "Now I know I must be awake!" she said to herself. "It wasn't a dream. There is a man out there on the water,

in the old gondola. Who can he be, and what can he be doing?"

Could it be one of the servants? was the next thought that came to her; but one by one she passed in mental review all the men who were now employed about the place, indoors and out. There were two young footmen under old Soames; and the elderly Scotch gardener and his son had been given three assistants. There was the chauffeur, and there were the coachman and two grooms, as well as a stable boy or two. But that tall slender figure which, as it slowly rowed the gondola, had seemed to her strong and graceful enough for King Arthur in his youth, was most surely not that of footman, coachman, groom, or gardener. As for the chauffeur, he was short, with round shoulders and unusually long arms.

Of course, Dolores had to admit that the man might be a thief or a poacher: and perhaps this bare possibility was enough to kill all wish on her part to go out alone and be romantic in the moonlight. But there seemed no reason why any sensible thief or poacher should take a dilapidated gondola and set forth upon a slow, apparently aimless expedition on the lake. He could not reach by water any point which could not be gained more easily, more quickly, and perhaps less conspicuously by land. Besides, she did not believe that a man with a graceful wand of a figure like that would ever sink so low as to steal-for Dolores was stanch in the opinion that the nobler a man's person, the finer must be the jewel his body incased—the soul. If she had been very ugly, she had often thought, there was no telling to what wicked things she might not have inclined, as a kind of revenge upon cruel nature, but if one were born good to look upon, one's actions must be good, so that one might live up to oneself, so to speak,

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and not break the harmony. She could not bear to think that that perfect form, which had seemed almost to be one in grace and mystery with the gliding gondola, could have been intent upon any bad deed, and she would not think it. But then—she did not know what to think.

After she had walked excitedly about the room, touching a familiar book or a bowl of cool-petaled flowers here and there, to assure herself that she was not really asleep in bed, she went back to the window. At first, she thought that the gondola had not yet come out from behind a clump of young willows on the little island; but when she had searched the wide line of shadow under the branching beeches and chestnuts which cradled the far shore of the lake, her eyes caught the glitter of water broken by an oar, a thin trail of crystal now and then, behind something dark that steadily moved on.

Nothing would have induced Dolores to leave the window again after this discovery until she had given herself a chance to find out what the man meant to do. She would stay and watch, she told herself, all night if necessary; and, indeed, it began to seem as if the mysterious gondolier knew that she was there, and had deliberately made up his mind to tire her out. In leisurely fashion he rowed to the end of the wall of trees, then turned, keeping in the shadow until he had reached the other end. Just where he would have to push out into the light if he had gone a foot farther, he wheeled once more to row along the path of darkness. Again and again he did this; and Dolores realized that he had only ventured into the moonlight long enough to steer across from the marble terrace, under which the gondola had been moored, to the shadowed water road on the opposite side.

It certainly did look, she could not help admitting, as if

the man did not wish to be seen by anyone who might happen to be waking in the house. He had not begun this strange voyage of his until an hour when he must have seen, if he had looked, that all lights in the windows were extinguished, and even then he had run as little risk as possible before calling on darkness to swallow him up.

If it were some eccentric stranger, moved by an irresistible desire for a moonlight row on the lake at Queen's Quadrangles, why had he not taken the smart new canoe instead of the poor old gondola? The canoe was easy to manage for a comparative amateur, whereas the manipulation of a gondola needed special knowledge, strength, and skill. Altogether, Dolores was completely puzzled; but she did not lose patience. She kept her post, her eyes scarcely ever leaving the lake, until the moon had traveled far down lilac steeps of sky, and a grandfather clock on some far-away landing had chimed the hour after midnight. Then she was rewarded by seeing the gondola break through the shadow and steer across the lake (steel instead of silver now that the moon was sinking low) toward the marble terrace.

"He will tie up the gondola again, I suppose, and then I shall see him come up the steps," thought Dolores, eagerly as the terrace was reached. "He can't go any other way, and I shall see what he does next. I should have seen him go down the steps if I'd been watching; but this time I won't move my eyes from the terrace, after he's taken the gondola underneath."

The old clock on the landing chimed another quarter hour, but no dark figure mounted the white steps. There was no other way up, for one who had put away a boat under that marble roof, and so the man must come, Dolores repeated to

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herself must come, by and by. But at last it was half an hour since he and the gondola had disappeared, and nothing had stirred in the shadow.

Could he have swum away, or did he perhaps mean to sleep all night in the gondola? Dolores would have given much to know, but even if she had dared to go down and try to solve the mystery of his movements and intentions, between the time of her leaving the window and again coming in sight of the lake and the terrace, the man might easily walk away.

As she still looked and wondered, the moon sank behind the tall trees in the distant park, and darkness fell suddenly.

CHAPTER TEN

LOVE AND GHOSTS

OLORES said nothing next day about what she had seen.

It was rather a charming mystery, she thought, that seemed woven of moonlight and the Idylls of the King. It would spoil everything to talk of it to others who might believe she had had an "optical illusion." Besides, her mother would perhaps be frightened, and not having seen the poetically graceful figure in the black gondola, might think, as she herself had so stupidly thought for an instant of thieves or other night marauders. There were more reasons, as well for being silent, and all seemed good to her. Dolores wanted to keep the mystery for her own a little while at least. She wanted to watch and see if the man came again to make another voyage on the lake. But she decided to begin watching earlier, so that, if possible, she might learn the direction whence he came.

Naturally, as soon as breakfast was over, and Frances had begun to write letters, the girl slipped away and went to the lake.

The "marble terrace," as it was called, was no more than a very large platform extending for some distance along the water's edge, and then jutting out over it, supported by pillars bearded with trails of moss and floating golden weeds. The terrace had a low railing of marble, on which stood great

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marble vases filled with flowering plants. And underneath the terrace were rings and chains for mooring boats.

Dolores walked down the steps and out upon a small lower platform about two feet in width, by means of which the boats were reached. There was her canoe, floating light as a stray leaf on the clear green water; and there was the gondola.

It looked just as it had looked on other days, shabby and sad, its gilding faded, its rich carvings chipped, and Dolores was vaguely disappointed. She had half expected to see a flower lying on the floor, or a dropped letter, or some other trace of last night's occupant; but there was nothing. Even the knot in the frayed rope, which moored the gondola to a rusty ring set in a big block of marble, seemed to the girl's eyes precisely what it had been on other days. Yesterday, she reminded herself, she had said that she would like to see one of the ghosts of Queen's Quadrangles. Could it be possible that she had seen a ghost?

In the afternoon St. John de Grey called on Mrs. Eliot; and Frances, who had already found him in the peerage, received him pleasantly. He did not make up to her for sins of omission on the part of his relatives; but she had, for a woman, an unusually strong sense of justice, and she felt that it would not be fair to visit upon him the crimes of others. She did the honors of the old house prettily, yet there was a certain constraint in her manner which St. John understood. Toward the end of his visit, therefore, he boldly took the bull by the horns and grappled with the dilemma.

"My sister and brother-in-law have been wanting to call on you ever since you came," he said. "But—well, the fact is, Lady Rosamund Vane-Eliot hasn't received anyone for a long time. Indeed, I think she made it pretty plain that she didn't

want people here. That's why nobody seems to feel at liberty to call now, even though it's different, of course, and in a way the house is yours."

"Yet, you have come?" said Frances, smiling rather tremulously.

"I'm out of it all," St. John explained. "At the time of—the time when Lady Rosamund made up her mind that she wanted to be let alone, I was a 'sub' in India, where I'd just joined my first regiment. After that, I went to South Africa and had some fighting; and since the war I've mostly been in Egypt. Now I'm supposed to be an invalid. Anyhow, I'm on sick leave, though I begin to feel pretty fit already. There's nothing like this air." (He did not add that the improvement in his health was synonymous with a sudden increase of interest in life which he had begun to experience yesterday.) "And then," he went on, "this was never home to me, so I wasn't in any way identified with the interests of the neighborhood. I've come and gone, as a bird of passage, paying visits to my sister. Things that seem enormously important to people hereabouts don't seem important to me at all."

"I see," said Frances. But she did not see; she only groped in twilight. "So Lady Rosamund quarreled with the county—years ago? I didn't know that."

"It wasn't a quarrel," said St. John.

"What was it, then? Can't you tell me?"

The young man hesitated. Dolores was at the other end of the lawn, throwing sticks into the lake for Troddles to retrieve. Still, he could not speak what was in his mind. "I'm afraid you'll think me rather an ass or a prig," he stammered, "if I say I don't know how to tell you that. But I hope I'm not either one."

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- "Of course you're not," Frances returned, absent-mindedly. "I—suppose it was a scandal—of some kind?"
- "No, that's not the word. It was—a tragedy. It isn't for me to tell you—here, of all places. And yet—I think somebody ought to have told you."
 - "You mean-Lady Rosamund?"
- "No—o. When one comes to think of it, that would have been almost impossible. Jove—no, she couldn't!"
- "The agent who let me the house?" Frances asked the question more of herself than her guest. "Or, perhaps, he wouldn't have known?"
- "Yes, he must have known, I should think. Probably he felt it wasn't his business to put you off the place. Lady Rosamund was his client."
- "So, if I'd known, it would have 'put me off' from taking Queen's Quadrangles?" Frances caught him up with a slight flush on her pale cheeks. "Is the house haunted?"
- "Oh, it's haunted right enough, if one's superstitious," said St. John, laughing uncomfortably. "That's nothing. All houses as old as this must be haunted. But—"

Without their hearing her, Dolores had come up behind them.

- "Are there men ghosts or women ghosts at Queen's Quadrangles?" she asked lightly, making them start.
 - "We didn't know you'd come back, Lolita," said Frances.
- "Or you wouldn't have talked about ghosts before the 'child,'" she laughed. "Oh, I know you wouldn't; but the mischief's done now, so you may as well go on. I'm not afraid of Queen's Quadrangles's ghosts, for they're sure to be gentlemen and ladies. Captain de Grey knows what I think already. Please tell me, is there a ghost of a tall young man,

slender and graceful, with a proud way of holding his head, and good, straight shoulders?"

St. John looked at her in surprise. "Who has been telling you about him?" he blurted out, before he had stopped to think.

"Oh, then there is supposed to be such a ghost!" Dolores took the admission up quickly, with a flash of startled excitement in her eyes.

St. John tried to retrieve his mistake. "I think I said yesterday that I didn't believe in ghosts."

"I know. Still, if there were such beings, a man like the one I described might be likely to come back from another world to visit this place? That's what you mean, isn't it?"

"Your description might fit plenty of ghosts," St. John temporized, smiling, but not quite happily.

"Yet you seemed to think at first that it fitted one in particular. Do tell me about him."

"Somebody else must have been doing that already," said St. John.

"Has anybody—one of the servants or anybody else—been gossiping to you about such things?" asked Frances.

Dolores shook her head teasingly. "Not one of the servants, anyway," she answered. "If I have a little secret, I shall keep it."

"Ghost stories are nonsense," said Mrs. Eliot. "It's silly to think of them."

"It's very interesting," persisted the girl. "Won't you tell me about my ghost, Captain de Grey?"

"Captain de Grey is to do nothing of the kind, even if he could," broke in Frances. "You're much too imaginative and fanciful already. I won't have you dwelling on silly ideas like

that. If you do, it will just spoil Queen's Quadrangles for us both."

"You see, I am forbidden," said St. John.

"Yes, you are forbidden, for now; and for when you come again, as I hope you will," said Frances. "That is, if "—she added a little maliciously, "you don't mind associating with people who seem to be ostracized."

Sir John reddened for Ermyntrude and poor shy, conscience-stricken Jim. "I think you're rather cruel," he said, "but I don't wonder. It isn't to be expected that you could understand. It's all a beastly shame anyhow."

"Please don't try and force your friends to come to a house where they don't wish to visit," said Frances, seeing what was in his mind. "We have been very happy here so far, without anyone, and we shall go on being happy, no doubt."

"But you're going to stop on for years, aren't you—at least, I hope you are," exclaimed the young man. "You can't live in this big house month in and month out all by yourselves, without any friends; it would be monstrous. I—I won't have it. Something must be done."

Frances laughed without bitterness now. "You are quite a chivalrous knight for forlorn dames," said she. "But I don't see how you can do anything. You're only a man."

"All the same, just wait and see," he warned her mysteriously.

Then he shook hands with mother and daughter, and went away, his head seething with wild schemes for forcing everybody who was anybody to call upon the tenants of Queen's Quadrangles.

His first effort was made at home, and failed as far as Lady Ermyntrude was concerned. As she reiterated, when she knew

that she was right about a thing, she never changed her mind. After all that had passed, it would be simply impossible for her to enter that awful house. As for the argument that it belonged now to these Americans, and not to Lady Rosamund Vane-Eliot, this was mere sophistry, as St. John must admit if he were not determined to be arbitrary and obstinate. The house was Lady Rosamund's, and she was in it. To call there on somebody else without asking for her would be like running to the servants' hall and making a visit. St. John could not see that? Well, then, it was because he was a man. Jim could go, if he chose, as vicar; but, of course, if he went without his wife, the Americans would have a right to feel that they were being slighted. On the whole, she thought even St. John must see that from their point of view this would be making bad matters worse. Besides, why did St. John care so much? The girl might be as nice a girl as he described her but she could be nothing to him.

"Oh, can't she?" echoed St. John angrily—for his virtuous sister could always make him lose his temper. "That's for her to say—by and by."

Lady Ermyntrude fixed her eyes upon her brother, losing her exalted expression for a moment. "What—do—you—mean, if you mean anything?" she asked slowly.

"Only that, unless she snubs me too much, I shall ask her sooner or later—sooner if possible—whether she will let me be something to her. I tell you, Ermyntrude, she is the most adorable—the sweetest, prettiest, gentlest girl you ever saw. I always felt, if I should ever fall in love, it would be at first sight, and I have."

[&]quot;I hope you're joking," said Lady Ermyntrude.

[&]quot;I assure you I'm not."

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- "Then what about Gladys Gaines?"
- "Confound Gladys Gaines!"
- "You're extremely rude. She will have twenty thousand a year."
 - "Hang her twenty thousand a year!"
 - "You are—almost sacrilegious," said Lady Ermyntrude.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE DOOR UNDER THE TERRACE

HAT night was clear and perfect as the last had been; but it was too cool for sitting out of doors, in Mrs. Eliot's opinion, and as there was nothing else to do with the evenings at Queen's Quadrangles, except read novels or play Patience, she made no objections when Dolores proposed to go to bed very early.

While Frances dropped asleep in the midst of wondering whether any Americans she knew were in London, and could be induced to come down and visit her, Dolores sat in the window seat again, with the lights out, watching. This time she had not waited to undress; for seeing the windows already black, the man of mystery might think the coast clear for his moonlight tour on the lake. Her feet tucked under her, tailor fashion, elbows on knees and chin in hand, the girl waited for a dark figure to move along the lawn on its way to the marble terrace at the water's edge.

But no such figure appeared on the silvered expanse of grass. If it had, she must have seen it; and it was still so early that if the man feared discovery he would not have ventured out before.

It had not been quite ten when she took her place at the window, but eleven o'clock struck without the fulfillment of what Dolores began to realize was hope. She wanted the man

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to come. She would be deeply disappointed if he did not come.

It was as she admitted this in her mind that the black shape of the gondola shot out from under the white terrace, and, with the same wandlike figure silhouetted against water and sky, was propelled along the path of the moon.

Dolores's heart gave a bound. How had he got to the sheltering place of the gondola without being seen? Had he been hiding in the darkness under the terrace for more than an hour? If he had, it would mean that he had come from somewhere—wherever that "somewhere" might be—while many windows facing the lake were still bright with light, and people stirring about the house. Indeed, she and her mother had taken a short stroll before coming upstairs.

Nevertheless, there was the tall figure in the gondola; and the course steered was the same as on the night before: straight across, through the moonlight to the long line of shadow; then back and forth, back and forth, until at last, after a row of more than an hour, the gondola returned to shelter once more. More eagerly than ever did Dolores watch after that, to see if the man would come up the steps, but he did not come. If he were in truth a ghost, he could not have vanished more mysteriously; and the girl began to like the thought that he was a ghost, the hero of some strange story dim with years, which others knew but would not tell.

If a little while ago anyone had warned Dolores Eliot that she would come to believe in ghostly apparitions she would not have laughed, but she would have shaken her head in firm conviction of the contrary. If there were such things as ghosts, other people might see them, but it could never happen to her, she would have said. Now she was not at all sure

that it had not happened. It would be difficult to account in any more material way for the sudden appearance and disappearance of the figure in the gondola; and perhaps the gondola was not the real, but a phantom one.

In any case, there was nothing to fear. Even if the tall young man should suddenly glide through her closed door, and glide out again, she thought that she would not be frightened—well, not *much* frightened. And she longed to see what his face was like.

She was too excited to sleep much that night; and when she waked at half past five o'clock she sprang instantly out of bed. Twisting up her long hair and slipping on a traveling cloak which covered her from head to foot, she ran downstairs and opened a window of the drawing-room whence she could walk out upon the lawn. There was a heavy dew, but Dolores was not afraid of wetting her little satin bedroom slippers.

Already it was daylight—a pale, glimmering daylight, like moon rays sifting through white fog—though the sun had not yet climbed over the edge of the world. The girl went softly and swiftly to the marble terrace, where she descended the steps, and walked round the lower platform to the mooring place of the boats. She had thought that, if the man were a real man who had rowed the real gondola, he might have slept the night in it, and not yet be gone. But the gondola was empty. The same knot of rope still tethered it to one of those blocks of marble which made the wall underneath and at the back of the terrace; or if the knot was not the same it had been tied in the same fashion.

So he had eluded her, whether he were man or spirit; and Dolores stole back into the house again to go back to bed and

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try to sleep another hour or two. But "I will know—I will know!" she said to herself.

That day St. John de Grey paid a second call, and brought his brother-in-law, the vicar, who had too much tact, despite his wretched shyness, to apologize in words for not having been before. He carried a note from Lady Ermyntrude hinting at "a cold" which prevented her from leaving the house and inviting her and Miss Eliot to "waive ceremony" and come to dinner one night next week. Also St. John de Grey had news. A friend of his, Lady Desmond, had telegraphed the Duke of Bridgewater, whom she had known all her life, that she wanted to come down to Tillingbourne Court presently and bring some people to stop for a few days. She would call on Mrs. Eliot, and the duke would come with her if he were well enough to go out, but as he was rather an invalid (or thought that he was, which meant the same thing) he was seldom to be counted upon.

Frances was quite shrewd enough to guess that Lady Desmond and her satellites had been hastily summoned by Captain de Grey, as genii are called by rubbing lamp or ring. Also, she was not blind to the reason for all this kind interest in her welfare on the part of the young man; nor was she displeased by it. She thought him delightful: and democrat though she was, the fact that when his childless brother died he would become an earl, did not militate against him in her regard. She had married an Englishman, and she did not see why Dolores should not follow her example.

As for accepting Lady Ermyntrude's informal invitation, she was at first doubtful; but Mr. Heckshaw's kind, near-sighted eyes and shy manner won her heart. Besides, it would be awkward to refuse Lady Ermyntrude's overtures, if her

brother's friendship were to be enjoyed. "As she is the vicar's wife," Frances argued persuasively, "perhaps I may make an exception with her. But, of course, other people's invitations I must refuse, if they won't give me the chance of returning their hospitality."

"Don't you think Captain de Grey one of the nicest young men you ever met?" she asked Dolores after their first two callers had gone. And the girl said "Oh, yes"; but she answered absent-mindedly, and Frances wondered where her thoughts were wandering. She even hazarded a guess or two, but she would never have guessed the truth—that Dolores was thinking of a ghost.

Not only was Dolores thinking of the ghost, but she was making plans to see it again, and at closer quarters.

It was all very mysterious, but the part which puzzled her most was, whence came the figure, and whither did it go when it vanished. As it was an "out-of-doors ghost" and she had decided that she was not in the least afraid, be it a thing of flesh or spirit, she had thought of a scheme which she could scarcely wait to carry out. Accordingly, she kissed her mother good-night at half past nine that evening, but stopped in her bedroom only long enough to put on her dark traveling coat, and ring for the maid who must be taken into her confidence. The woman was told that Miss Eliot wished to watch the moon rise, and would like to be let in again soon after eleven.

Secure in the knowledge that she would not be locked out of the house for all night, Dolores skirted the lawn, keeping under the shadow of trees or close to dark, herbaceous borders until she had come so close to the marble terrace that she could hear the whisper and lap of water against the white columns.

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Within a few yards of the terrace a great weeping willow hung its head of flowing tresses, which nearly touched the ground. Dolores crept under the waving canopy, and huddled in her cloak, sat down on the grass to wait.

By and by the moon rose, silvering lawn and lake, and luring from each flower its sweetest secret of perfume. In the growing light, Dolores could see from where she sat the black shapes of the gondola and the canoe, moored under the roof which the terrace made. A faint gray gleam touched the close-set marble blocks of the wall at the back, where the big rings were fixed, and suddenly it seemed to the girl that it was not only the slowly creeping streak of moonlight which moved there.

At first she thought it could be no more than a weird flickering of light and shadow that gave the strange effect, but at last she knew that it was not merely an effect. The big middle block of marble was being pushed slowly outward, like an opening door.

Dolores's heart began to beat so fast and hard that it almost choked her. It had been all well enough to say in bright, wholesome sunlight, or looking out into the sweet night from the safe haven of her own room, that she was not afraid; but she could not say that now, even to give herself courage. A startling, wholly unexpected, almost incredible thing was happening under her eyes, and she was afraid, shamefully afraid.

The door under the terrace opened toward her. It was nearly three feet square, and in the aperture behind it was a faint glimmer of light. At last the door was pushed wide open, and framed in the space it left was the figure of a man, the yellow light from an old-fashioned lantern shining up to his face.

It was the figure she knew, Dolores was sure of that; and as for the face—it was the face she could have wished for, if she had dared hope for the best. Even with the lantern sending up fantastic shadows, like overstrong footlights before a darkened stage, it was a noble face, cut in strong, clear lines, which seemed somehow to match the grace and strength of the figure. Yet—or it was an effect of strange lightning—the face was sad to tragedy, hardened to a terrible self-control which seemed to have turned it to marble, for it was marble pale in the lantern light. In that light, too, the eyes were great wells of sorrow; and a vast pity and sympathy growing in Dolores's romantic young heart chased away all fear.

If she saw a man or woman whom she admired, her first impulse was always to compare the living person with some hero or heroine of history or poetry, for the girl's happiest hours were lived in books and the thoughts which books gave. Now, she said to herself that this man—or spirit—looked like Launcelot, Sir Launcelot of the Lake; and he was of the lake. She held her breath as she peeped at him, yet was half ashamed to peep.

He appeared to have no fear of being spied upon, or even to think that spying might be possible. He bent and set down his lantern somewhere behind and below the door in the wall. Then he put his leg over the high barrier of the doorway, as if it had been a stile to climb, and in a second more he was on the other side, standing on the platform a step or two above the water's edge. Thence he reached into the aperture, where a faint light still showed, and brought out a long oar such as gondoliers use, after which, having pushed the block of marble almost, though not quite, into place, he stepped into the old gondola, and reaching up, untied the rope.

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All this he did tranquilly, without any sign of haste or excitement, and so quietly did he push out from under the terrace that the water scarcely murmured at the dip of his oar. For a moment, he passed from Dolores's sight, then came out in full moonlight as she had seen him come when she watched remotely in her window. He steered across the broad sheet of silver and was swallowed up as on the two other nights, in a deep gulf of shadow near the margin of the lake.

When he and the gondola could no longer be seen from where she sat under the willow, Dolores still felt a weight of guilt, as if she had spied upon a scene to which her eyes and ears had had no right. But then she reminded herself that it was she who had the right to be here, not the man of the gondola.

This place was her mother's now, and therefore hers, and if that were granted, the man must be trespassing. Mysterious as he was, he could not, she supposed, be in reality a ghost. He must have discovered this hiding place somehow, and be using it for his own purposes.

They could not be bad purposes, the girl thought. A man with the face of Sir Launcelot of the Lake did not do mean or treacherous things; but whatever the mystery was, she had a right to search and find the key to it—if she had the courage.

Yes, if she had the courage! there was the stumbling block. She was not afraid of the man, but she hardly knew which was stronger, her dread or her desire of seeing what lay behind that secretive block of marble which was a door. Then she remembered how she had said to herself that she must know whence the man came, if she discovered no more. Now was the time to learn, and perhaps there would be no other time but

this. Afterwards, how she would reproach herself for cowardice if she did not take advantage of this chance!

Quivering with excitement, and not knowing whether the thing she did was right or wrong, Dolores flitted out from the shadow, ghostlike as the figure she had followed. Only the determination not to be a coward kept her from running back as fast as she could go to the house. She had but a few steps to take, and then she would reach the flight of marble stairs which led down from the terrace to the platform underneath.

CHAPTER TWELVE

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR

HE night was still bright, but while the girl had sat waiting under the tree by the lakeside, a wind from the south had sent rain clouds boiling up over the horizon, and now the white moon shone through a long, straight slit in darkly gathering masses, like a piece of silver in a gashed black purse. Dolores had only a small patch of shining grass to cross, and then she plunged again into shadow.

The man had not pushed the block of marble tightly into place. Perhaps he knew that, if he did so, he would not be able to open it from outside. Dolores pulled at the big ring to which the gondola had been tied, and after two or three tugs she had the door open.

The light on the other side burned as when she had seen it last, a dim yellow glaze; and the first thing it showed her was that the marble formed but a thin layer covering a thick piece of wood, heavily barred across. There were three large bolts on the inner side, at top and bottom and in the middle, so that when shut, even if one knew the secret of the block of marble, it would be impossible to force it.

The girl was looking into a narrow, arched bricked passage, just high enough to allow a tall man to walk without stooping. Several steps led down to a roughly flagged floor, and on one of these steps stood the old-fashioned lantern

which the man had placed there before embarking in the gondola. The brick walls looked very old, though well preserved, and were streaked as if with a vague pattern of green mold or moss. Peering in, it seemed to Dolores that, after going straight on for a distance of perhaps fifteen or twenty feet, the passage either came to an end or made an abrupt turn, and the thought of venturing into it was like an adventure in the "Arabian Nights."

There was no question in the girl's mind as to what she would do. She was filled with a delicious terror at the thought of exploring the passage, yet she was as definitely compelled to explore it, as if she had been hypnotized.

"The end of the passage," she whispered on the first step; but even the remembrance at such a moment of Rudyard Kipling's terrible story did not drive her back.

Four steps she counted, and then she stood on the flagged floor, with the brick arch of the low roof seven or eight inches above her head. There was a damp, yet not unpleasant odor in the place, like that in an unused cellar, and as Dolores took up the lantern a rat skurried past her feet. Holding up the light, she watched the tiny, swift shadow dart to the far end of the passage, where he disappeared. Either he had a hole there, where brick and stone joined, or else the passage branched to the right.

It was cold as well as damp in this strange, underground corridor, and the smell of hot iron given out by the lantern was comforting in its commonplaceness, seeming almost to impart warmth. Physically hesitating but mentally determined, Dolores walked on, throwing back a glance now and then. She had not dared to close the door lest there should be a hidden spring of some sort and she should find herself

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a prisoner. There was the chance that the man of the gondola might come back before she had made discoveries and got away, but for two nights of moonlight before this she had watched his tactics, and knew that his voyage on the lake had on each occasion lasted more than an hour. Now, he had only just gone out. It would hardly be worth his while to go at all unless he stopped long enough to pay himself for his trouble; and brave as Dolores was made by curiosity, she had a conviction that her courage would soon be burned out. When it flickered and died she would hurry into the sweet peace of the moonlight again, and hide herself from the man, even if she did not run into the house. Then he could come back when he liked, and need never know that his hidden haunt had been discovered—unless she found it wise and right to tell.

It was not until she had almost reached what had at first appeared to be the end of the subterranean corridor that she saw a dark archway to the right of the far wall. She felt it more terrifying to pass under this archway and go on into the black unknown than it had been to traverse the short, straight passage where return to the open door was simple and easy. But the girl had obstinate blood in her veins: Spanish blood which had boiled in fire lit by Philip the Second; English blood, shed on the block by Cromwell; New England blood which had flowed without grudging on battle-fields of the Revolution.

She followed where the little darting black shadow on the floor had led, and then found herself in a branching passage exactly like the first. Now, down somewhere under the level of the lawn, she knew that she must be going in the direction of the house. Still she went on, and so long was the passage that a curtain of darkness shut off the end, waving always

elusively before her as she moved. At last, however, she came suddenly upon a door of iron, so black that she had almost touched it before she knew that a solid barrier blocked the way.

There were two great bolts on the rusty sheet of metal, one at top and one at bottom, and a big ring instead of a handle midway between the two. Evidently the man of the gondola had no fear of pursuit, for he had not shot the bolts, and Dolores pulled the door toward her, the hinges giving out a faint groan which sent her heart up to her throat. But there was no other sound, and holding the lantern high with a little cold hand that was far from steady, she peeped round the opening door.

On the other side there were two more bolts of formidable size and quaint make, which suggested the handiwork of some long-past generation. Beyond was a cellar, empty so far as Dolores's lantern showed, and walled with a shadow. In the midst of this space a spiral staircase of stone wound up to a square hole in the vaulted roof of the crypt or cellar; and this square, more than two, but perhaps less than three feet in size, was defined by a faint light which burned above.

The narrow twisting staircase of stone had no handrail, and Dolores mounted, feeling slightly giddy. Her heart was beating like the strokes of a hammer in her breast, and the sound was so loud in her ears that she was not sure whether some outside sound might not be mingling with it. Nevertheless, she had to go on. It seemed to her that she would have had to go on even if she had been sure that some one waited at the top of the stairs to strike her on the head.

But no one was there. She reached the last step and stood looking round, quivering with that mingling of terror and

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curiosity which combine to make the tensest excitement the human brain can know.

What she saw was a small court, marble paved. One of the blocks in the pavement—a mere veneering of marble on solid wood, as was the door under the terrace—had been lifted and laid back upon the floor, and it was this aperture which gave entrance from the cellar beneath.

"What a lovely court!" was the first thought which sprang into the girl's head as it rose above the level of the floor. Then she was surprised at the banality of such a thought, considering the mystery of this strange, secret place.

There was a fountain in the center of the court, just a small marble basin filled with water, out of which rose the delicate figure of a naiad. Stooping, the marble maid raised slim arms above her head, holding up carved masses of trailing hair; and from her hands and from her hair dripped water which fell with a pearly splash into the basin.

This court was square, like the great Fountain Court and the Court of the Cypresses; but four of its size might have existed in either of the other two and still left much room to spare. The north and west walls were of marble, unbroken by door or window, or any carving. The smoothly joined blocks glistened in the light, pale opal blue at the top under the moon, ivory below where the rays of a tall lamp gilded their white surface. Against these two blank walls were placed many huge jars of red terra cotta or quaint old Moorish pottery, mingling rich coloring, blue and black and yellow; while in the jars grew spreading palms, and orange and lemon trees hung with balls of gold.

Near the fountain stood a carved seat of marble, with a rose-colored cushion of old velvet, such as Italians love to

lay on marble; and drawn close to the seat was an inlaid ebony table of Eastern shape and make. On this was the tall lamp whose rays gilded the gleaming walls, its flame softened by a modern shade of seaweed-green silk, which might have been fashioned by some dainty woman of taste; and the light of this lamp with the moonlight filtering down from the high purple roof, which was the sky, gave to Dolores's astonished eyes the whole strange picture.

The south and east walls, also of marble, were pierced with doors and windows, all set in exquisitely carved frames, such as the girl had seen in pictures of old Venetian palaces. The double row of windows, four on each side—two above and two below-showed that there were rooms on two stories, facing upon the court; and one of the two carved-oak doors, standing half open, had a light behind it. Dolores peeped round, and then ventured into the room she saw. It was small-tiny compared with those to which she had grown used of late; but it was beautifully paneled in oak up to the ceiling, and there were many shelves closely filled with books. Of furniture there was very little; only a couple of old oak chairs, a highbacked seat which might have graced a monastery, a table, and a curious Spanish chest, which was open and evidently in use as a writing desk. But the covering of chairs and table was of wonderful old brocade of a rose ground, stiff with the gold which formed the pattern wandering over it. On a mantel stool silver candlesticks, and above hung a full-length portrait of a lovely girl.

She was in a dress which might have belonged to any period since the sixteenth century; white, with a filmy fichu, whose ends floated in a breeze of the artist's imagining. Her hands were full of pink roses, and she and they seemed fresh as the

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morning suggested by the sunlit blue and white of the land-scape background. She leaned forward, smiling, as if looking for some one, and her face had not only the charm of youth, but the allurement of conscious beauty. The eyes were either dark gray or black, and the hair, dressed to please an artist, was a red chestnut, full of gleams and shadows. The lips were full, their pout half coquettish, half petulant, wholly provoking, the nose delicate and haughty. The girl seemed born to be worshiped and made much of by men who would give their lives to keep all sorrow or sordidness from her, and think themselves well paid by such a smile as the picture immortalized.

"Lady Rosamund might have been a little like that when she was a young girl," Dolores thought. "Perhaps this is the portrait of some relative or ancestress of hers."

Then some slight sound made her turn, and she found herself facing the man of the gondola.

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THE GHOST

POR a moment neither spoke. They stood looking at each other, Dolores unconsciously holding the lantern, her hand nervously tight upon the handle. The light fell on her face and made her great eyes luminous, while a shadow veiled his.

She had stumbled upon some extraordinary secret; and since this great house of Queen's Quadrangles was her home, nobody had a right to a secret in it, yet she felt crushed and miserable, like a caught spy, and all her eager curiosity was dead or lying stunned.

He was very stern and pale, or else the dim light in this oak-walled room darkened his eyes and hardened the lines of his face into cold severity.

"Well?" he said at last.

Only that one word, yet into it Dolores's excited fancy read anger, contempt, and something like desperation. He looked and spoke like a man at bay, facing a great danger, not afraid, but resolved to know the worst, and to know it at once. Also, there was something strange about his voice. It sounded unreal, as the voice of a hermit or a prisoner unaccustomed to speaking often might sound. These things she thought, though had she stopped to question herself about them, it must have seemed fantastic to deduce so much from one word, a monosyllable.

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"I—are you—a ghost—or a—real man?" she faltered like a child.

This was not what she had meant to ask. The foolish words tumbled out in spite of her, and he answered before she had time to speak again more sensibly.

- "I am a ghost," he said; "and this is my ghostly habitation. Will you tell me who you are, and—why you come here?"
- "I am Dolores Eliot. But—but perhaps you don't know who that is?" the girl stammered, her cheeks hot.
- "And if I do not know?" He was not smiling, but looking at her intently, never once releasing her eyes from his.
- "Oh, then—well, I live here—at Queen's Quadrangles, with my mother. She has—taken the house."
- "I see. And you want me to understand that I've no right here? But if I am a ghost, I have a prior right. New tenants seldom succeed in turning out old ghosts." Now he did smile faintly, but there was no merriment in his smile, only bitterness, which somehow seemed all the sadder for the smile.
- "We—I don't think we want to turn anyone out," said Dolores, confused and unhappy.
 - "Not even a ghost?"
 - "I can't believe that you are a bad ghost."

Perhaps she only imagined it, but it seemed to her that the marble-cut face suddenly softened a little, becoming humanized, as if a statue had under some magic influence felt the thrill of life.

"Why can't you believe me a bad ghost?" he repeated, in that strange voice which was sweet to the ear yet unreal as an echo.

[&]quot;I-you don't look wicked, only-sad."

"Only sad!" he echoed. "Only sad."

"And lonely," added Dolores.

He smiled again, his pale face a beautiful mask of tragedy against its dark background.

"I suppose all ghosts must be sad and lonely," he said.

"It is their fate, if they insist on haunting a world in which they no longer have any place."

Suddenly a vast pity for the man swept over the girl, overwhelming her as with a great crystal wave. "Oh, you have a place!" she cried. "You must try to feel that you have a place. Not to feel that must be horrible."

"I have ceased to feel," he said. "In some cases, to let oneself feel would be worse than the death that I have died. But don't be frightened"—his tone changed as she started and shrank. "I ought not to talk to you like that. Yet how should a ghost know how to talk to a girl? The marble girl of the fountain is the only one with whom I hold any converse, and she is the only one to whom I have a right to speak. You ought not to have come into this—ghost house."

"It is—the lost court!" Dolores said, in an awed whisper, more to herself than to him.

"Yes, it is the lost court," he repeated, with a ring of that bitter defiance which the girl had heard in the first word he spoke. "And I am a lost cause, more lost than ever, now that I have been found."

Dolores's eyes, which had scarcely left his, dilated. She shivered delicately.

"You are lost, because I have found you? Is that what you mean?" she asked.

"Yes, that is what I mean."

"You think I will tell people that-you are here?"

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- "Why should you not?"
- "Because—well, just because I couldn't. And because of what I said: that you aren't a wicked ghost. I don't know what you are doing in this secret place, or who you are—"
- "I am no one. Ghosts have no name, no identity. Think of me as a man that was, and am no more."
- "It's all very, very strange, and I don't pretend to understand," went on Dolores. "But if you can't explain—"
 - "I can't explain," he broke into her questioning pause.
- "I shall try to think it's all right that you should be here," she finished bravely.
- "At least I shall not do harm to you, or to anyone," he said. "You may be sure of that."
- "I am sure. I don't quite know why, but I know that I am very sure. And I can see—that you are unhappy. Not for anything would I make you more sad than you are."
- "You are very good—wonderfully good, to a poor ghost," he answered, a look of yearning passing like a bleak light across his face, the look a man might throw from behind prison bars at a fair landscape of spring flowers. "You won't turn me out, then, from the only place I am allowed to haunt?"
 - "No," said Dolores.
- "But not turning me out means not telling anyone that I am here. If anybody knew, the ghost would be immediately exorcised."
 - "You shan't be exorcised," the girl promised.
- "Even if you should do nothing but tell that the lost court still exists, I should have to flit," said the ghost.
 - "Does anybody know?"
 - "I believe that scarcely a living being, except yourself,

knows. I don't count. I am not a living being. I'm out of life —out of the world, unless you call this a world, of which I am the only inhabitant."

"It's very beautiful here," Dolores said thoughtfully.

"I suppose it is. But oh, how sick of it I've been these many years—how sick unto death!"

"I'm so sorry!" exclaimed the girl, with a new pang of wondering pity.

"But I'm ungrateful to say that," he corrected himself, in a more natural tone than he had used before. "After all there might perhaps be a worse fate. You're right. It is beautiful here. Many things should make it beautiful for me."

"How strange that this court and all these rooms should exist without anyone knowing," said Dolores, looking about with admiring interest.

"Not so very strange, perhaps," the ghost answered. "Many generations ago Queen's Quadrangles was struck by lightning in a great storm which carried destruction all over the county. This part of the house was badly damaged, and the man who owned it then gave out that it was destroyed. He had his own reasons for wanting its existence forgotten, they say. Then he restored it as secretly as it had originally been built."

"But why should it have been built secretly?" asked the girl.

"Oh, Don Filipo, who built the house, loved a beautiful countrywoman of his own, though he married an English lady. I don't think it's a story I could tell you. The secret was discovered somehow, though, and given away—not the secret of the entrance, but the fact that there was a third court so well hidden no one outside need ever have guessed that it

existed. Very few ever knew for certain, however; the master of the house did his best to spread the impression that it was all gossip. And as the great storm I told you of came nearly two hundred years ago, it has been called the 'lost court' for over a century, farther back than the memory of the oldest man could go."

- "But not farther than the memory of ghosts, since you found it," said Dolores gravely.
- "No, not farther than the memory of ghosts," he repeated.
 "I wish that a ghost's memory were shorter."
- "Perhaps you're the ghost of the man who built the house and made the hidden court?" She was smiling a little now, for though her nerves were keyed high with excitement still, she had long ceased to be afraid.
 - "Perhaps."
- "And—is that a picture of the beautiful Spanish lady you loved when you were alive?" Eagerly, yet half ashamed, Dolores asked the question, pointing to the old portrait over the mantel.
- "It is a beautiful lady I loved when I was alive, and whom I am permitted to love—beyond the grave." As he spoke, he looked at the painting with such worship in his tragic eyes that Dolores had a curious sensation of loss and aloofness. What difference did her insignificant sympathy make to this strange man who called himself a ghost, while such love still had power to warm his heart?
- "Then," the girl said timidly, "then you can never feel quite alone."
- "Not quite," he replied. "That is why there might be a worse fate than mine. I have love—to remember."
 - "And no other joy?"

- "Oh, a few other memories. And after all, what does it really matter whether a thing happened two centuries or two minutes ago? It is equally past—over forever, not to be recalled."
 - "That sounds terribly sad," said Dolores.
- "I should be sorry to have anything seem sad to you," he answered. "You are like a glimpse of sunshine—sunshine on spring flowers. It's many years since I've seen that—except in imagination. Ghosts keep their imagination, you know—intensified a hundredfold."
- "Oh, but not to see the spring and the flowers!" cried the girl.
- "I said, not the sunshine. Ghosts can't stand sunshine. I see the spring and the flowers by moonlight sometimes. It's not the same. But it's next best. Ghosts must be thankful for 'next best' things."
- "That's why you go out in the gondola; to look at the flowers and the moonlight?"
- "The moonlight comes to me here—as you see. And a few green things. Did you ever read the story of Picciola? I've been in the habit of stealing out at night, when the weather wasn't too bad for ghosts, for many a year now. There's pleasure of a sort in escaping even for a few minutes from the place you're doomed to haunt. But how can you realize that? You're not a ghost. You're a happy young girl, strayed like Eurydice into Hades; only you didn't come to see Orpheus. You came only to explore, because the gate of Hell was open."
- "Ah, I hope it isn't really that to you," said Dolores. "I know you couldn't have deserved it."
 - "It does me good to hear you say so-somehow; to be taken

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on faith by some one who is young and sweet is rather like a drink of cool water when one has been thirsty for a long time."

- "I wish I could do more than that for you!" breathed the girl.
- "You are going to do a great deal for me—more than I had any right to expect. You are going to keep my secret, and the secret of the lost court."
- "And the gondola, too. Please, please go out on the lake just as if I hadn't seen you. Will you promise to do that, to reward me for my promise to you."

He looked at her very searchingly. "Yes, I will go," he said. "I'm trusting you completely, you see."

- "So am I trusting you," she retorted. "I'm here all alone with you, you know. If you were a wicked ghost, it would be in your power to frighten me to death."
- "Think of me as a most grateful ghost. This night will be an epoch in—my ghosthood; a very different one from what I thought at first it would turn out to be for me."
 - "When you thought I would tell?"
 - " Yes."
- "Well, now you know I won't. Not to anyone in the world, even my mother. And I won't look at the lake in the moonlight any more, if you'd rather I didn't."
- "I would rather you did, if you really mean that my haunting it sometimes won't spoil the place for you. And if that will spoil it, I'll stay away."
- "Don't stay away. It gives me pleasant thoughts to see you there; thoughts of a poem of Tennyson's. Only—it did make me curious. I had to come and find out where the figure came from, and whether it were real or a ghost."

- "So you thought even then that it might be a ghost?"
- "Yes. You see, the other day at Miss Greenleaf's—but perhaps you don't know who the Miss Greenleafs are?"
- "Are they friends of yours?" It seemed to Dolores that the worn face lighted up with a kind of wistful eagerness that was not all sad.
- "I've met them. Such dear little ladies—twins; just alike. And their house is like an old-fashioned doll's house—at least, compared with this. It smells of pot pourri and spices, and the Miss Greenleafs smell like dried lavender."
- "Dried lavender!" he echoed. "How that brings back—many things. But they—these Miss Greenleafs, did they tell you there was a ghost at Queen's Quadrangles?"
- "Not they, but a woman who was calling on them—a Mrs. Calendar, with stick-out teeth and boiled gooseberry eyes, and a figure just like a tenpin. And Captain de Grey——"
 - "Yes, Captain de Grey? Is that another friend of yours?"
 - "He's just begun to be. He came here—"
 - "Here-to this house?"
- "Yes, to call on mother, and brought his brother-in-law, a sweet old man with a face like a wind, near-sighted Irish terrier, if an Irish terrier could be bright pink——"
 - "But he isn't old. He-"
 - "Do you know the one I'm talking about?"

The poor ghost seemed to flush; and the red that crept over his face made him look younger, less like a marble statue come alive.

"Perhaps," he said slowly, as if apologizing for the interruption, "perhaps I was thinking of former generations of people hereabouts. To one who has come back to this bourne as I have years are as moments, moments as years. Why, I

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hardly know one night from another; days can't be said to exist for me. But I shall know this night from others, forever. It makes a break for me in the long monotony. I thought that consequences very evil for ghosts would surely come of your visit when I first saw you here, but now I bless the chance that brought you. The memory will be a bright spot as long as—as I am doomed to haunt this spot."

"It wasn't chance that brought me," said Dolores. "I was watching for you, in sight of the marble terrace; and when I saw that door underneath I had to find out what was beyond."

"You were very brave."

- "I don't know. I couldn't just help it. I'm so glad that you're not angry, because now I feel——"
 - "Now you feel?"
 - "As if this place belonged to you."
 - "Rather do I belong to it. It's all I have."
 - "Can't you go-I mean haunt-anywhere else?"
- "Never. Never! But if you will add to your great goodness to me, you'll ask me no questions. I could not answer them. I daren't beg that you won't question others—"
 - "Would others know about you?"
- "Not about me. But they might rake up an old, old story, if you spoke of a ghost at Queen's Quadrangles. I shouldn't like you to hear that story. But I've no right to try and prevent your hearing it. Nor could I, if I would. I'm helpless."
- "You're not helpless," protested Dolores impulsively, because you've said you didn't want me to hear the story, whatever it is, and I won't. I won't ask. And what's more, I won't let people tell me stories about Queen's Quadrangles,

even if they want to—which they won't, I think, for everyone seems to hate talking of the place."

The man's face changed, and something like a shudder passed through his body, which he controlled, and pressed his lips tightly, almost painfully together. "That is natural—and it is well," he said at last. "Thank you again for saying you won't listen to—ghost tales, and for not questioning me. I am a ghost—that's all. And that is, nothing. So I wouldn't repay the trouble of questions."

"I always thought that I shouldn't be afraid of a ghost, especially if he were a ghost haunting a beautiful place like this," said Dolores, more lightly. "Now I know I was right about myself. I hope ghosts don't hate girls?"

"I told you that you were like sunshine on spring flowers—to a ghost. But sunshine is fleeting, in a ghost's anomalous existence. When it goes, it will leave the darkness more visible than ever."

"What if it should—come back?" Dolores asked timidly, the blood streaming over her face. "Shall it come back?"

"You would come?"

"Why not, if you cared about seeing me, and would say open Sesame' to that strange door under the terrace?"

For a moment he was silent, looking at her as if in a dream. Then "Why not?" he repeated, rather bitterly. "Why not? I dare say your mother would let you visit some poor consumptive wretch, slowly dying in a cottage? Then she needn't object to your coming to a wretch already dead, and worst than dead—a wretch to whom you would bring fresh aid and memories of another life."

"Oh, I will come!" exclaimed Dolores.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE SECOND DREAM

HEN Dolores stood once more on the steps of the marble terrace, with the secret door underneath so tightly closed that its very existence had become incredible, she could hardly believe that the episode of the lost court had really happened.

How much more likely that she had fallen asleep under the willow tree, and having started up in a wild dream, had waked to find herself before a shut door in a wall which had never opened!

There was the gondola tied, as usual, to the great ring in the block of marble. And there was nothing to remind her of the "ghost" who had propelled it so skillfully, or of her conversation with him in that "lost" part of the house which he haunted. His long oar was gone; his lantern was gone; the door by which she had entered and by which (in the dream) he had let her out, was gone.

The glory of the moon was gone; not because the hour was late, but because of billowing clouds that let only a faint, watery gleam of light steal through. There had been rain during her absence (or sleep) for the marble steps glistened with moisture and the grass which had been dry was wet. If there really had been a man in the gondola and if a secret door really had stood ajar, and she had dared to explore what lay on the other side, it must have been that sudden storm

which drove the rower off the water. If no drenching rain had fallen, the nightly tour would not have been cut short, and she would have finished her dream-explorations without being caught. At first, when she had turned to find that she was not alone in the oak-lined room of books, there had been a moment of consternation and a wild wish for escape; but now she was glad, very glad, that the dream had ended as it had. It seemed to her that no girl in the world could ever have had a dream so intensely interesting, so wonderful as this. And then, the best part after all was, that she could go back into the dream again, taking it up where she had left off. Many times she had wished, and tried, to do that with dreams, but she had never succeeded. With this dream it was going to be different.

In her heart, of course, Dolores felt sure that she had not dreamed, though she had actually to force upon herself the conviction that her adventure had been real. But when she had been quietly let into the house by the maid who waited her pleasure, when she had undressed and was lying in bed, the experience seemed more and more remote. Next morning when she waked after an unusually heavy sleep, into which she had fallen very late, there was no longer any need to impress the dream theory upon her mind. She did indeed doubt that the adventure had happened, and would doubt it until she could—as she put it to herself—" get back into the dream again."

She had—or dreamed that she had—made an engagement with the man of the gondola for the hour before midnight.

Night, he had said, was his day. So it was, and must always be with a ghost. Ghosts were allowed to "walk" by night, and at no other time. Ever since he had become a ghost

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(he did not say for how long, though he spoke wearily of many years) he had come out of his haunt within four walls to see the trees and the flowers and the lake, to take such exercise as a ghost might be permitted, and to breathe-if a ghost did breathe-freer air than he could find in the miniature court with its sky roof. No one had ever seen him before; or if anyone had, ghosts were to be expected at Queen's Quadrangles: and at furthest he never went beyond the boundary of the park. If he could feel pleasure, rowing in the lake in the poor old gondola had been a pleasure, and he was glad that the new keeper of his secret did not wish him to give it up. But it would be a far greater pleasure if she would come to him again, and tell of things in the world that he had known before he became a ghost. He did not "materialize until country folk had gone to their beds," he had added with the sad, yet faintly humorous smile which Dolores seemed to see as plainly when he was absent as when she had been with him. Ten o'clock at earliest was his first hour of freedom, and at half past ten he would open the door under the terrace, trusting her completely.

Real life was dim for Dolores after the vividness of her dream. She tried to take an intelligent interest in her mother's talk of the people who were coming to visit the Duke of Bridgewater, and Captain de Grey's extraordinary cleverness in organizing that visit.

"It's all for us. I can see that," said Frances. "He hinted the first day he called that everything was going to be different by and by. I think he's marvelous. They say Englishmen are stiff and standoffish, and selfish, unless they go over to America to live, like your father did; but Captain de Grey couldn't be nicer if he were an American. Why, he's so

cosmopolitan, he might be a New York man! I wonder what this Lady Desmond of his is like? I've looked her up in that Peerage I bought in London, and it seems she's a viscountess, and a widow, about thirty-two or three. That isn't quite as grand as being a countess, I suppose, but it comes higher up than a lot of other titles. And we shall get to know the duke. I've always thought I should rather like to know a duke."

So he chatted on that day, and Dolores listened, making appropriate answers. But never had hours seemed so long in passing, not even the days before Christmas when she had been an eager little child, looking forward to the emptying of a wondrous stocking.

Nothing had been arranged with St. John de Grey about the afternoon; but as the mother and daughter returned from a drive he trotted up to them on horseback, followed by Toddles. The Eliots had been to see a view which he had praised to Frances, and there was nothing more natural than that he should ride beside the carriage to hear what they thought of it.

Frances, at least, thought so many things that his horse kept pace with theirs to the gates of Queen's Quadrangles; and then Frances asked him in. It was very late for tea, but they had not had it, and if he had not, they would be pleased to give him some.

By the time tea was over it was nearly seven—only one hour before dinner; and then such a fierce shower came up that, as Frances exclaimed, it wasn't fit for a dog or horse to be out, much less man.

"If you'd care to stay and dine," she said, "we shouldn't mind your not being in your evening things. You really can't go out in such weather."

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So St. John stayed; and after dinner it seemed that he knew a wonderful new game of Patience, which, though intricate, could be taught in a single evening. Frances loved Patience, which, she had been brought up to believe, was not like "playing cards" in any other way. She threw herself heart and soul into the learning of the lesson, and time went on unheeded by all save Dolores.

They sat in the small white drawing-room, and the girl's eyes kept wandering to the beautiful old Louis Quartorze clock on the mantel. Ten o'clock: a quarter past: twenty minutes past. Would he never go?"

Then the gold minute hand neared the half hour. What should she do? How could she bear it to miss the appointment of which she had thought, to the exclusion of everything else, throughout that long day?

She dared not try to slip away, for she could not escape without being seen and questioned. Besides, her mother would think her both unkind and rude. And if she made even the cleverest excuse for disappearing it would seem as if she were impatient for Captain de Grey to take his leave.

There she had to sit, as if watching the dreadful game with interest, while all the time she would have liked to snatch the cards from St. John's strong brown hands and throw them out of the window.

If only she might yawn behind her hand and give him a gentle hint! But Dolores had been reared with the profoundest respect for the laws of hospitality, and to yawn with the view of getting rid of a guest would have been a monstrous infringement of those rules. Besides, she was guiltily conscious that, if she had not met a ghost who absorbed all her

thoughts, the society of this flesh-and-blood young man would have passed the evening agreeably.

At last, at last, he jumped up, pretending to be horrified that he had stayed so long. With alacrity, Dolores flew to touch the bell, and Captain de Grey's horse was sent for. Toddles was patted, his master was shaken hands with, dozens of perfectly useless words were exchanged, and the guest was off. But still Dolores was not free.

Frances wanted to talk over the evening, and to explain the great feature of this new Patience. She wished to know if Lolita didn't think Captain de Grey nicer every time he came, and if she wasn't looking forward to all sorts of gayeties when Lady Desmond and her party arrived. The girl was tempted to tell a fib and say that she was sleepy; but she knew (because her father had told her when she was very small, and she had never forgotten) that fibs were not only cowardly and mean, but vulgar, and that a lady could not be guilty of one, any more than she could eat with a knife.

Luckily, a habit had been formed lately by which the daughter saw the mother to her room, and kissed her goodnight there, instead of the contrary way which had obtained in earlier years. Nevertheless, it was eleven when the two parted, and Dolores knew not what to do.

Half an hour ago it had been almost fine, and she would have had some sort of excuse for bidding a maid sit up to let her in after a moonlight stroll. But now clouds had gathered again; she dared not arouse gossip in the household by an eccentricity; and unless she chose to risk being locked out, she must wait until the old butler had gone the rounds of the house, fastening doors and windows. Then she could slip out and leave a way of return open.

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By the time that old Soames had pottered off to bed it was a quarter past eleven, and nearly an hour later than the appointment. Dolores told herself that, even if she had not dreamed the handsome, sad ghost of the lost court, he would have given her up long ago, and would be disgusted with her for breaking her promise. But when she hurried down to the marble terrace with rain spattering on her red tam and dark-blue coat, the ghost was sitting in the gondola.

"Oh, you are real, then!" she exclaimed. "I was so afraid I had dreamed you."

"I wish you had," he answered; but his tones was lighter than it had been last night. "Then, when you waked up, I should have ceased to be—a ghost. But I wouldn't want you to wake till after we had a few more long talks—to tell the truth, I was beginning to be afraid I had dreamed you."

"I do hope you didn't think I was rude," said Dolores.

- "Rude? I should be a strangely idiotic ghost to connect such a word with you. I thought—well, I thought that you had thought better of it, that's all. And I didn't blame you, for you would have been right."
 - "Right-in breaking a promise?"
- "Men must keep their promises. Women have the privilege of forgetting theirs."
- "But I wanted to come," said the girl. "I've been thinking of nothing else all day. And I've brought you a present. Are you going to ask me into your house?"
- "It's true, it's very damp and dismal under this terrace," replied the ghost. "But—I'm wondering whether I ought—whether your mother—"
- "I'm sure, if mother knew you," said Dolores kindly, "she would like me to pay you visits, because you must be so lone-

some, and mother can't bear to be left alone for very long herself. If you'll take me to your bookroom again, I'll stop with you for half an hour, if you'd really like to have me."

"Really like to have you!" he repeated. "You can't imagine what it is to me. Come, then. I had almost given you up, but I couldn't bear to go back while there was any hope."

"I wanted to be exactly on time," said Dolores, "but Captain de Grey stopped to dinner, and he was showing mother how to play Patience. Mother likes him very much."

"And you?"

"Oh, I like him, too. He's very good-looking, and so kind. He's always thinking of something nice to do for us. Mother believes that he's persuaded some friends of his—Lady Desmond and several others—to come down to visit at the Duke of Bridgewater's just for our sakes, to make things gayer."

"Lady Desmond!"

The name seemed to break from the ghost, and so changed was his voice that Dolores looked at him in surprise. They were on the steps inside the secret passage now, the door shut behind them, his lantern in his hand.

"Do you know Lady Desmond?" asked the girl, forgetting for an instant that this man was not as other men.

"I do not know her," he answered steadily. "I have been dead for countless years. Once—when I was alive, I knew a lady of that name. But it was long, long ago."

"Yet you look young," said Dolores.

"I—young?" he repeated, as if startled. "I am as old as sorrow!"

"I wish you needn't be so sad!" the girl sighed.

"Thank you," he answered, as they walked on together

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along the narrow passage which brought her slim shoulder close to his arm. "Your wish makes me a little less sad."

- "I've brought you a present," said Dolores again. "When we come to your house, I'll show it to you."
 - "A present?"
- "Yes. But I'm not going to tell you what it is, because it's a surprise."

She laughed, half under her breath, in a pretty, childish way she had, and glanced up at him. His eyes were on her, and he did not look at all like a ghost now, even in the wavering lantern light.

Rain was falling on the marble pavement of the lost court, pattering crisply down on the great green fans of the palms, and the thick leaves of lemon and orange trees, which glittered in the light that streamed from every window in the ground floor. Both doors stood ajar, but the ghost led Dolores toward that which opened into a room she had not entered last night, a room different from any she had ever seen before.

- "How beautiful!" she exclaimed. "It's not like England or America. What country is it like?"
 - "Spain," the ghost answered.
- "I feel as if I ought to have known that," the girl said, because, though I've never been to Spain, I have visions of it always, and feel almost as if I knew it quite well. My father's grandmother was Spanish, and I'm named after her. He used to tell me things about Spain, just as he used about England. Were you ever there, when—when—"
- "When I was alive?" he finished, as she paused. "Yes, I've seen Spain. I used to go there and paint pictures."

Dolores looked about with eager admiration. The walls of

the small but well-proportioned room were of oak, as in the adjoining room with the many bookshelves. Here they were hung with wonderful old embroidery and brocade, stiff with gold and silver, and there were three or four pictures of strange, sunlit towns, and wild mountain scenery. There was one picture, too, which seemed to represent a fairy palace; and all were pained with originality and spirit as well as supreme skill.

- "Did you paint these?" she asked shyly.
- "Yes," he said.
- "Then you must be a great artist."
- "The ghost of a man who loved art, that's all. But these things are a comfort to me, especially that old sketch of the Alhambra. They bring back memories of life."
 - "And—and you never paint now?"
 - "Can a ghost paint?"
- "I think I've heard of ghost pictures," said the girl gravely.
 - "I've never cared to try. I've lost interest."
- "When you have such splendid talent? Oh, how could you? That's like losing interest in your own soul."
- "So I have, completely—my own soul and what seems to you to be my body. I should have destroyed the semblance of it long ago if it had not been—for a promise—a vow."
- "It makes me miserable to hear you say that," said Dolores. "And to think you have lost interest in things. Can nothing ever bring it back to you again?"

He gave her a quick look which had all the old tragedy and a new fear in it. "If anything should bring it back, what I suffered in the past would be as joy to what I should suffer then."

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Dolores's eyes opened wide. "What can you mean?" she asked.

"Let us think of something else," he said. "That way madness lies. You said you had brought something for me. A suitable present for a ghost?"

Dolores, vaguely saddened and puzzled, yet anxious, above all, not to hurt him, did not persist with the subject which he put aside.

"I am ashamed of my poor little present, now I know you can paint so gloriously," she stammered. "Only—I thought—I wondered if you might amuse yourself sometimes with this." She took from a large pocket of her cloak a japanned box of water colors, and a small sketching block. "How silly it does seem now. But I had this of my own. I bought it in London, thinking I would try to paint bits of the garden when I came here. My wretched little daubs were so unworthy, though, that I couldn't bear to go on. And then, to-day—but when you said those pictures on the wall were yours, I hoped you'd forget about the surprise I spoke of; and I meant not to mention it again if you hadn't. I don't suppose you ever cared for water colors anyway, and—"

"I loved them once. And now—will you throw off your cloak and let me sketch you? Just a little sketch. If I haven't forgotten everything I once knew it won't take many minutes."

Without a word, Dolores sprang up from the chair in which she had been sitting, and slipped off the big blue traveling cloak which had enveloped her. The slender, girlish figure in the soft white dinner dress stood out like a delicate statuette of marble against the old gold and crimson brocade which draped the wall behind her. The little oval face with its great

eyes of black velvet, and the soft flush of rose color on ivory skin, was beautiful as perhaps it had never been before; for Dolores's prettiness changed with her moods. Sometimes she was strikingly, almost pathetically lovely; again she was merely a pretty young girl with fine eyes, the perfect complexion of youth, and a cloud of dark hair. To-night she was radiant, like an illuminated flower. The man's eyes burned as he looked at her, as they might have burned in worship for a picture by a great master suddenly unveiled.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I think you will make me remember some things I believed that I had forgotten."

"Not things you'd rather forget, I hope?" she asked anxiously.

"I don't know—I don't know. But I thank you. I do know that I thank you. Stand as you are, if you will. I want to sketch you like that."

She stood still, watching him. He went to the far end of the room, where a carved, black oak table stood. On it was a crystal jug of water, and he poured some into a glass. Then he came back and began to paint with the box of colors open on a curious stand under which was a brazier. There were no coals in the brazier now, but Dolores wondered if he used it to give him warmth in cold weather, for the room had no fireplace; and now she remembered that there was none in the room she had seen last night. Of course, she said to herself, since the lost court was made as a hiding place it would not do for smoke to be seen ascending. She tried not to be indiscreetly curious about the secret which this strange place held, for the secret was the ghost's secret, and since he wished her to ask no questions, she must strive not to ask them even of herself, in her own mind. One day, if she were allowed to go on

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visiting him, and at last become his trusted friend—perhaps he would tell her some things; yet if he did not, she must still be satisfied with this wonderful experience so like a dream. But at least there would be no disloyalty to the ghost in finding out to-morrow, if she were clever enough, how this miniature house within a house was hidden between the walls of the great mansion whose formation suggested no mystery to an uninitiated eye. Knowing of its existence as she now did, she might be able to puzzle out the plan.

This thought was taking shape when the sketch began; but soon it was superseded, for the prisoner was even more interesting to her than his beautiful prison.

Last night, though the ghost's expression had haunted her, she would not have been able to describe him accurately. He had appeared with such suddenness; she had been so startled and astonished at first, and so tremulously excited throughout their whole interview, that she had had no time to think what he was like as a man. Besides, the library had been less brightly lighted than was this richly colored room, and she had known only that the amazing apparition was dark and handsome, with a face that was still young, though worn and tragic.

Now, as he rapidly sketched, she saw that he had dark chestnut hair, with a ripple in it that made the nobly shaped head look as if it were carved in bronze. She saw that his eyes were gray, not black, though the straight brows were dark, and that his skin was of that dead white which goes with absence from sunlight. To-night, as last night, he wore evening dress, and something about the clothes struck Dolores as peculiar, though she was not sure in what particular they differed from things which other men wore—men of fashion, who were

not ghosts. She resolved to look carefully at St. John de Grey when she and her mother dined at the vicar's. Then, perhaps, she would know what the difference was. But, though it was certain that Captain de Grey was a well-dressed man, and a man of distinguished appearance, he was almost plain compared with this tragic figure, this ghost who haunted the lost court at Queen's Quadrangles. And in thinking of De Grey, she felt something almost like resentment against him, because he was so brown and hearty and happy, so altogether more fortunate than her mysterious new friend—her "dream friend," as she called him to herself.

"The sketch is finished," said the ghost, startling the girl from a reverie. She had forgotten for the moment that she was posing as a model, and had stood statue-still only because she had been too absorbed to stir.

He brought the sketching block to her, and they looked at it together, his bronze head bent near to the black cloud of her hair. Dolores's things were always kept in drawers lined with sachets of orris root; and if he had not been a ghost he must have been conscious of the faint perfume which, to those who knew her, seemed part of the girl's personality.

- "It is beautiful," she said, "far too beautiful for me."
- "I don't think so," he answered. "Am I to give it to you, or—will you allow me to keep it?"
 - "Would you care to?" asked Dolores.
- "Very much." He spoke quietly, almost coldly, and his words conveyed no flattery; yet somehow Dolores knew that he did really want her picture very much, even more than he cared to tell her; and she was glad.
- "Keep it, then," she said, and put the sketching block back into his hand. Their fingers touched, and a queer little

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thrill ran through the girl's veins, which seemed to go on and on, not stopping until it reached her heart.

"I must go," she exclaimed suddenly.

He did not urge her to stop for a few minutes more, as she half hoped he would, though she did not mean to stay.

- "Yes, you must go," he said. "But—just a word first. There's a thing I should like you to know, and since you are sorry to see me sad, not realizing that it's a ghost's doom to be sad, you'll be pleased, perhaps. It's this: you've brought me something wonderful. And I shall keep it with me, when you've gone, even if you never come back, for now you've given it to me, you can't take it away."
 - "What is it that I have brought?" she asked.
- "I can't tell you in words, if you don't understand without. But did you ever read Hans Christian Andersen's story of the mermaid who became human?"
 - "Oh, yes, it is the one I love best!" the girl cried.
- "Well, if a ghost could become human once more, I think the talisman you've brought would turn me into a man again. That's the best I can do toward explaining what I mean. Now, I'm going to take you home by another way that you don't know, so that you won't have to go out in the rain."
- "And you'll promise to care about things again—to take up your painting?"
 - "Yes, since you promise me your encouragement."
- "You shall have that—oh, as much as you want! How I wish you would give me a little advice about my drawing. Maybe with your help I might do something—if you wouldn't think it too much bother?"
 - "Too much bother!" he laughed out, almost wearily.

"Would it be too much bother for a lame man to walk, for a blind man to see?"

"Then you are to be my teacher. And I'll come to you every night that you care to have me, unless I have to go somewhere with mother, or we have people with us who stop too long. We hardly know anyone now, except Captain de Grey, but I think we shall soon."

"Yes, you will know a great many people soon," he said, "and there will be a thousand claims on your time. You will have engagements all day, and even when you happen to have a free evening, you'll be too tired to waste on a wretched ghost in his prison the hour you ought to give to your first beauty sleep."

"Wait and see," said Dolores. "If those days of many engagements come, I shall have all the more to tell you about. I shall have almost as much news as the last edition of an evening paper."

"Yes, about your games of tennis and your dances—with other men, who are not ghosts. I'm not sure how well I should stand that. Ghosts aren't famous for their unselfishness. But to-morrow night you will come?"

"To-morrow night without fail."

"Come, then," he said. "If I let you stay longer I shall not deserve to have you again."

She started as if to go to the door, but he pushed back a fold of the red and gold brocade which draped the north end of the room from floor to ceiling. Behind it Dolores saw a low door which was just visible in the oak paneling. Taking up the lighted lantern which he had set down on coming in, the ghost opened the door to show a dark and narrow passage.

"This is tunnelled out in the eastern wall of the house," he

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said. "It will lead you into the long gallery, and so to the big hall. We must speak softly, if at all, in the passage, for voices echo strangely. I will go ahead, and let you out."

"Why, the wall must be enormously thick to have such a passage through it!" exclaimed Dolores.

"It's twelve feet thick," he said. "Don't you know how deep the side windows are in the library, and the steward's room? There is a kind of passage leading to each."

"I remember I thought those side windows in the library so quaint when I first saw them. But I've only peeped once into the steward's room. Lady Rosamund has it now. You must—I suppose you knew Lady Rosamund—when you were in the world?"

"That is so long ago I have had time to forget most things. But ghosts have their ways of knowing those who live in the house that they haunt. You will come out at the end of the secret passage, close to the door of the steward's room in the long gallery. You must go past that door very softly and quickly. Now follow me, and in five minutes you can be in your own room."

He bent his head, and passed through the low doorway behind the brocade. Dolores flitted after him, neither speaking, their footfalls inaudible. She counted fifteen short steps along a level and then his stopping brought her also to a stop. There was a faint click, no louder than the cocking of a well-oiled revolver, and her guide moved aside to let her pass, still in silence. The light of his lantern showed her an opening in the rough stone wall. She slipped past him and out into the space beyond, which was dimly lit by some unseen lamp. A glance showed her that she was in the corridor known as the "long gallery," which ran from the east end of the house as

far as the door of the dining-hall which was opposite her as she stood, though too distant to be seen in the dusk. The great central hall, into which this corridor ran, was always lighted at night by a big hanging lamp almost as old as the house itself; and thus the "long gallery," to right and left, was dimly illuminated.

When Dolores had made sure of her surroundings—the work of a few seconds—she turned to throw a parting glance at her guide; but to her astonishment she was looking at a blank wall of paneled oak. No door was visible in it, but so near that she could have touched it by putting out her hand, was the closed door of the room occupied by Lady Rosamund Vane-Eliot.

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OUTSIDE THINGS

HOUGH it was long after midnight when Dolores went to sleep, she was awake early next morning, and down before the table had been laid for breakfast in the great dining hall. She had often noticed the curious difference which existed between the library windows looking on to the east terrace, and all the other windows of the house, except those of the steward's and priest's rooms, neither of which had she ever really entered; but knowing nothing of architecture, she had not wondered much what the reason might be for this difference.

Now, however, she asked herself whether the immensely thick eastern wall might not have been planned solely to hide the secret of the third court. The thickness of this wall must contain four of the hidden rooms, two on the ground floor and two above. As for the room of the many book shelves, which she had seen first, Dolores's present idea was, that it probably lay behind a room for old books which opened off the library at the back and was lighted only from a window in the corridor. This little room—which had fascinated her ever since her knowledge of Queen's Quadrangles began—was so dusky that to a careless eye its depth appeared indefinite. Until last night, she had vaguely supposed it to be divided by a wall from the priest's wardrobe which opened off the long gallery, but now she guessed that the secret room of the bookshelves

and the miniature court of the fountain must lie between. One would only have to climb to the roof of the house, she thought, to look down on the third quadrangle with its pretty fountain, lying as it must (with its suite of rooms round two sides) between the eastern wall and the corridor that ran along the court of the cypresses.

What a strange thing, the girl said to herself, that in all the hundreds of years since Queen's Quadrangles was built, no curious chimney-sweep had discovered the secret of the third court! It seemed to her that such a discovery would have been easy enough, and she wandered out on the dew-wet grass of the lawn below the south terrace, to look curiously up at the chimneys, gables, and battlements of the wonderful old house. Then she saw, what she must have seen often before without observing it particularly. A wall-like erection of brick ran across the roof from north to south, east of the cypress court. This was so high that no chimney sweep, even if he had spy's work given him to do, would be able to succeed in climbing it without a ladder. On the other side of the house rose another wall of the same height; but Dolores believed that it had been placed there merely to match the one which screened the lost court, with the view of disarming any possible suspicion.

Now that Dolores knew the secret, and was aware of the hidden door at the end of the long gallery, it was comparatively easy to make these deductions; but she could see how even those who passed their whole lives at Queen's Quadrangles might never have suspected the existence of a third court.

Evidently, at some remote period in the history of the place, it had been imperative for the owner of the house to spread a

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report that, if there had ever been a third court it had been done away with in alterations.

Certain it was that, unless there had been a secret to hide, the little concealed quadrangle and its mysterious suite of rooms would never have been made. If, again, the same strange need had not arisen, masters of Queen's Quadrangles might have been proud to show so unique a feature, well calculated to enhance both the historic and romantic interest of the place.

One day, some time ago, Dolores had found in the library an ancient book with quaint illustrations. It was called "Stories and Legends of Famous Old Houses," and some of its grewsome tales had kept the girl awake, shivering deliciously, the night after she had read them. One story in particular had impressed her; and now, as she stood in the door of the book room, behind the library, thinking of what might lie just beyond the wainscoted wall, it crept back into her mind, that legend of a secret, and a never-ending curse upon an ancient Scottish castle.

Always the heir was told the ghastly thing on the day when he came of age, and after that was never seen to smile. He was taken to a secret room, and there shown a man who was of noble and youthful appearance, but was in reality hundreds of years old, as evil in heart as he was beautiful in face. This man, who had once been lord of the castle, had committed a terrible crime, and an old woman whose fair daughter he had ruined before murdering by starvation had cursed him and his house forever. "May you live and suffer for as many years as you gave my child moments of agony," she had cried. "May you grow wickeder and more wicked till the day of your death, so that those under you may rise up in authority

over you and put you away lest you do evil to them and theirs."

And the woman's prayer had been answered. When the great lord's brother could endure his villainies no longer, they tried to put him to death secretly. But he could not die. The wound made by the knife of a brother next in age bled always, without ceasing, and festered, so that the stricken wretch writhed and shrieked with the anguish of his hurt. Yet he lived on; and then the other brothers did what they could, in their turn, to put him out of his pain and sin. But still, though all the wounds of a dozen deep stabs poured ruddy streams, the man did not die. At last they put him in a secret room, where he stayed through the long years, never growing older to look at, and remaining always glorious to the eye, save for the red blood that welled and stained his white shirt where his heart once had been.

This story had been peculiarly horrible to the girl's imaginative mind, but now she shivered and grew sick at the thought of it.

The hidden man of Queen's Quadrangles was not wicked, she would have staked her whole life upon that belief of hers. But he spoke so mysteriously of himself! He would not say how many years the lost court had been his world; though he hinted that he had been there so long he could hardly remember what life had been before.

Supposing that, after all, he was even more mysterious than she wished to think! What if there were more things in heaven and earth than she had ever dreamed of in her poor little philosophy, and he were really a supernatural being, the prisoner of a curse like the man of the hideous old story? What if he had lived in the lost court for more than the al-

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lotted span of a man's years—a century, perhaps, and no one knew that he was there, not even Lady Rosamund?

The existence of the court and his presence in it were both so astounding that a little more of mystery scarcely raised a new emotion. It was possible to believe almost anything—except that the man was in himself evil.

Dolores was absent-minded during breakfast and throughout the day. Her eyes were dream-haunted, but she looked happy, and Frances thought adoringly that she had never seen the girl so beautiful. Her complexion was so dazzlingly clear that it was as if a rose flame burned behind a thin sheet of ivory. "Can it be that she's beginning to care for Captain de Grey?" Frances wondered pleasantly.

She loved romance, though she was not in herself romantic; and she had always vaguely feared that she might be too lenient if Dolores gave her heart to some undesirable but fascinating man. Such a danger would be forever averted if the child should be drawn to St. John de Grey, for Frances was sure that his interest in Dolores was no idle fancy to pass the time. He had fallen in love with her, and by and by he would ask her to marry him.

What a delightful vista that thought opened! An engagement at Queen's Quadrangles would be an idyll, just such an idyll as would suit Dolores's poetic personality. Frances had always expected that, when love came to the girl, it would be a great romance, not an ordinary affair such as satisfied commonplace girls. But this would be worthy even of Dolores. She had plenty of money, and if Captain de Grey had not much of that, he had everything else. Dolores would be the Hon. Mrs. de Grey; and some day St. John might become an earl, as his elder brother had no children.

Already Frances saw herself writing letters of announcement to relatives (of whom she had few) and friends (of whom she had many) in America. She took credit to herself for resisting the temptation to question Dolores as to her feelings, for it was a temptation. But instead of being concerned about the girl's abstraction, she considered it the best of signs, and rejoiced in it.

It was arranged that Dolores should be admitted by the ghost of the lost court through the door under the marble terrace, and let out by way of the long gallery, where at that late hour there would be no danger of meeting anyone. On this third visit she took with her some beautiful roses, to show the lonely prisoner that she had thought of him during the day; and he was able to prove that he also had thought of her. With the water colors she had given him, he had sketched for her the charming little court with its marble naiad glimmering against a background of palms and lemon trees; and it touched the girl that he did not even ask her to let no one see the picture. Whatever he might be, whatever strange tragedy of life or death had drafted him to this imprisonment, certain it was that discovery would bring a catastrophe as mysterious, perhaps more dreadful than, his present fate; yet he placed himself in her hands with perfect faith; and the pathos of this unquestioning trust almost brought tears to Dolores's eyes.

The small sketch was as clearly the work of a great artist as the large oil paintings on the wall; and the presentment of sunlight on the fountain and the marble floor gave Dolores an odd little stab of pain. She had not thought of this hidden place in daylight; and seeing it as the artist had seen it with the midday sunshine prying into its secret, suggested a long,

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endless chain of hours passed in loneliness by this man who called himself a ghost.

He had said that "ghosts had no existence by day," and he was a ghost; yet there had been days as well as nights for him, days of sun and rain, but always days of sorrow, as the many years dragged on. "Oh, what have you done with the years?" was the question that sprang to her lips. But she did not utter it. The very thought was intolerable; that he had been here, shut up in prison, a ghost, through bleak years that had been full of daily delights for her! It seemed that, somehow, she must make up to him for all that he had missed, for all that she had had, which he had been denied.

The sketch he had made for her gave her pain as well as pleasure, but she spoke only of the pleasure, and it was terribly pathetic to see how her appreciation pleased him whose genius should be bringing him praise from all the world.

"I wish you could have painted yourself, sitting on the marble seat," she said. "If you were there I should have liked the picture still better."

"Would you?" he asked. "Then leave me the sketch, and when you come again you shall see what you shall see."

So she left the sketch, but several nights passed before she was able to make another visit. The lost court was now the heart of the world for her, but things were happening in the outside world, and she was forced to be in them. The dinner at the vicarage was given, and there was a guest who had not been included in the plan at first. This was Lord Tilling-bourne, the invalid Duke of Bridgewater's only son, who had arrived on a visit to his father, had seen Dolores Eliot in the village of Clere, had heard of the proposed dinner, and thereupon practically asked Lady Ermyntrude for an invitation.

He was very young, and his elders' objections to call on any tenants of Queen's Quadrangles had little weight with him. While Lady Rosamund Vane-Eliot had lived her lonely life there, the place had awakened no interest save a vague, morbid curiosity in the Marquis of Tillingbourne's mind. But it was quite different since he had met in the village one of the prettiest girls he had ever seen, and learned that she was an American heiress. He had now every intention of going to Queen's Quadrangles, and going often; but before he could do that it was necessary to meet Miss Eliot and her mother. He wished that girls had no mothers, as it bored him to be nice to any woman over forty, unless she were a fashionable beauty or an actress, but he was ready to be as nice as necessary to Mrs. Eliot, for her daughter's sake. Besides, it would be worth while for the fun of cutting out De Grey, even if there were nothing else in it; for if De Grey thought him "rather a young beast," he thought De Grey "a conceited prig," who fancied that nobody except himself knew anything, or had ever done anything worth doing.

Lady Ermyntrude did not think Tillingbourne a beast. Though she was not like Mrs. Calendar, to whom no man above a baronet could be beyond the pale, she was faintly attracted rather than repelled by the young man's almost brutal virility. His coarseness of fiber was manliness for her; and she thought his curly yellow hair, over a low forehead, his brilliant, impertinent blue eyes, his full, bright-red lips, and his great tanned throat almost Apollolike. He was a personage of importance in society (though he slighted it in favor of theatrical and other amusing circles), therefore Lady Ermyntrude would in any case have been willing to please him; but she did not want her brother to marry Dolores Eliot, and she

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was glad to help Tillingbourne as St. John's rival with the American girl.

Gladys Gaines was at least as great an heiress as Dolores, and Sir George Gaines, in buying his magnificent estates, had obtained with them the lordship of the manor. His was the living enjoyed by Lady Ermyntrude's husband, and after the duke he was the great man of the neighborhood. Once, the king had paid him a visit, and it would be more advantageous in every way for St. John to have Gladys instead of Dolores as his wife. Lady Ermyntrude was strongly of opinion that the British were the only people who really mattered in the scheme of the universe, and she would inwardly have resented a foreign prince taking precedence over an English earl. As for Americans, she could hardly conceive that they had a civilization, or that they might be gentlefolk by birth; and she had only consented to show any attention to the Eliots because it would be unpleasant to offend St. John. She was fond of him in her cold, remote way; and then, he was godfather to her only boy, whom he had promised to "see through" Sandhurst, when the time should come. Altogether, she was bound to please her brother when she could; but she had the best of excuses for inviting Lord Tillingbourne; indeed, as she explained to St. John, it couldn't be helped.

The dinner was to have been a family dinner, except for the Eliots, for as Lady Ermyntrude protested to her brother, it was too difficult, in the circumstances, to get people to come. No one wished to be inveigled into calling on the Eliots at Queen's Quadrangles, therefore no one wanted to know them. But then, after all, it appeared that somebody did want to know them, somebody in particular, no less a somebody than Lord Tillingbourne; and it was through the vicar himself that

the important young man had heard of the prospective dinner.

"Jove, that was a pretty girl I just passed, Heckshaw," Tillingbourne had said, buttonholing the vicar in the High Street of Clere, through which he had the boyish vanity to enjoy walking, on account of the flutter of attention he invariably excited. "Who is she? Stopping at any house hereabouts?"

Then the vicar had answered that she was a Miss Eliot, the daughter of a rich American lady, and that she and her mother were coming to dine next night at the vicarage. On hearing this piece of news, Tillingbourne remembered that he hadn't called on Lady Ermyntrude since the time before last that he was on leave, and recalling this fact he had turned to walk home with Mr. Heckshaw.

Without the slightest shyness he brought the conversation round to the tenants of Queen's Quadrangles, got it confirmed by Lady Ermyntrude that they were dining with her, and then said, "You might ask me. The pater and I are dull as ditchwater together. He's just got out a novel that I'd rather die than read, and I suppose nobody would publish if he weren't a duke. He's so excited waiting for notices to come in that he jumps if anyone speaks to him."

Having invited himself to meet her, Lord Tillingbourne could feel pretty sure of sitting next the girl who made it worth while to dine at the parson's, and he was not disappointed. Of course he was obliged to take in his hostess, but he had Dolores Eliot on his other side. She had gone in with De Grey, but St. John got little enough chance to talk to her. Tillingbourne saw to that, and if Lady Ermyntrude had not thoughtfully provided her brother with Glady Gaines, giving

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Gladys no other resource than the curate, St. John would have had to do far more listening than talking.

For him the dinner was a failure, and Dolores would have found it pleasanter without Lord Tillingbourne. Though she thought him handsome, in a pagan kind of way, that would have gone well with a laurel wreath and a tiger skin, his stare and his free and easy manner half frightened her. She had never met a man of his sort before, and it seemed to her that he was like a great, spoiled child. He appeared to think that he had only to ask for a thing to have it, and the girl felt an odd impulse to thwart and contradict him.

Once or twice at the table she half turned her shoulder upon the young man, in order to speak to St. John de Grey; but, if she had known it, she could not have chosen a way more calculated to enhance her value with Lord Tillingbourne. He was only twenty-four, but already he was sick of being flattered by girls and their mothers; and although he was annoyed at Dolores's indifference and meant to punish her for it some day, he liked her more the less she appeared to like him.

As for Frances, she still preferred Captain de Grey, but she was almost childishly pleased with Tillingbourne's boldly shown admiration for Dolores. This was the girl's first grown-up success, for they had been in mourning for over a year before coming abroad. Of course she would be pleased to see Lord Tillingbourne, she answered when he asked if she would let him come to Queen's Quadrangles; and she could have sung for joy because Dolores's pretty tennis and boating and dancing dresses would perhaps not be wasted after all.

They did not reach home until nearly eleven, and then Frances would stop with Dolores until the girl had undressed, talking over the dinner party. She feasted her eyes on her

daughter's beautiful hair when it had been let down, and thought what a wife such a charming young creature would be for any man, were he a mere "Honorable" or a marquis.

Next day, Lady Desmond arrived with several friends to make the expected visit to the duke. St. John de Grey brought her over to call on Mrs. and Miss Eliot, thus carrying out his plan; but it had not been part of the plan that Lord Tillingbourne should be of the party.

Dolores was out when they came, sketching a corner of the marble terrace, with its white reflection in the blue lake. The spot meant so much to her now that she grudged being torn away when a footman appeared with a summons from her mother. But the name of Lady Desmond had an interest not unconnected with matters which absorbed most of the girl's thoughts, and crossing the lawn to the house, she was conscious that her heart was beating fast.

The one she thought of had repeated the name after her, the night of their second meeting, and his eyes had had a stormy look as he admitted having once known a Lady Desmond—" when he was alive, many years ago."

Remembering this, Dolores felt suddenly eager to meet Lady Desmond, excited at the thought of seeing her.

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LADY DESMOND

HEY were sitting in the fountain court, where Frances was fond of having tea served when the weather was warm, and Lord Tillingbourne was explaining the duke's absence with a rather cruel enjoyment of his parent's peculiarities.

"The pater's lying crushed under the weight of a bad notice for his last novel," he was announcing in a loud, distinct voice as Dolores came within earshot. "The papers used to say his books weren't to be taken seriously, so from trying to add to the gayety of nations he became as gloomy as a walking funeral, and slightly immoral—I mean in print. Now the journalist chaps say, what a pity it is the Duke of Bridgewater has 'forsaken his old light manner'; so the poor old man's prostrate between two stools. I'm his proxy, though, and he wants you and Miss Eliot to come over and dine—and do all sorts of things. But Lady Desmond is going to talk to you about that."

He had got no further when Dolores appeared, coming into the court from the great hall, her figure very slim and girlish against a rich dark background of dimly seen splendors.

Lord Tillingbourne instantly dropped the thread of his remarks. And if the girl had been prone to self-consciousness she would have divined that not for him and Captain de Grey

alone did the curtain go up only for her entrance, but that she was the leading character on the stage for Lady Desmond also.

But Dolores had no thought for herself at the moment. She was thinking of the woman whose name had wrought a quick and sudden change upon a face already tragic. If Lady Desmond had wondered about the young person for whose sake she had been summoned to Surrey, the young person had wondered still more about Lady Desmond. It was with a shock of surprise therefore that she recognized the interesting visitor.

There was not even a question in the girl's mind: "Where have I seen her before?" She knew at once that it had been at Claridge's Hotel; that this was the lady who had cut the slip out of Country Life—the lead to whose curiosity-rousing actions she and Frances indirectly owed their possession of Queen's Quadrangles.

At Claridge's, that never-to-be-forgotten afternoon of early August when most of the world was at Cowes, Lady Desmond had been quietly dressed in gray, with a toque of silver tulle and silver thistles on the dark copper of her burnished hair. She had looked stately and rather splendid; but on this warm, Indian summer day, in white lace and muslin, with a big leghorn hat of picture shape heavy with roses, she appeared less dignified and much younger. Then, Dolores had taken her for a woman of thirty-five or six. To-day she appeared at least half a dozen years younger; nevertheless, in the searching white light of the fountain court, there was a hint of artificiality in her beauty.

If she were "made up," it was so well done as to puzzle the eyes of a rival; but even to Dolores's unsophisticated eyes the long oval of Lady Desmond's face was of a marvelous camelia

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pallor, the large, though bewitching mouth redder than most women's mouths, and the shadow under the long black lashes very brown.

Yet to the girl it was a wonderful face, with its greenishgray eyes flecked with red-brown spots just the color of the dark chestnut hair. As she met the eyes, fixed critically upon her, she was both fascinated and repelled, as she had been in a less degree at Claridge's.

For a second or two she thought that the gray-green eyes (which slanted up ever so little at the outer corners under level brows) were like cats' eyes, and that they gave her a cat look, such a look as a beautiful, petted Persian gives sometimes before it darts its claws. But then Lady Desmond smiled, and the impression passed; for the lady's smile was famous, and when she liked, could win women as well as men.

There was no spontaneity in it, but there was amazing charm. People who had heard of the celebrated smile, before meeting Lady Desmond, watched for it eagerly; but it did not come always, for she had other smiles which were good enough for ordinary folk and ordinary occasions: the famous one was very special.

She thought Dolores worthy of the smile, and gave it: her eyes lighting first, illumining her whole face; then the red lips parting, and instead of lifting at the corners, drooping sweetly until it was as if they pushed two small dimples into being—dimples close to her mouth, and so tiny that they might each have been indented with the head of a pin.

It was nothing to describe, but it was wonderful to see, and a tremendous compliment to have it done for one's sole benefit.

"Come and sit by me. I want to talk to you," said Lady

Desmond, and Dolores came. She felt that she would have been obliged to come if her feet had been bare and the floor red hot. Also, when Lady Desmond asked her questions, in a low voice—rather too young to match her personality, but honey-sweet—she knew that she would have answered even if she had wished to be silent.

"Have we met somewhere before?" the elder woman asked. "Strange, I can't remember; yet I feel I've often seen your face."

"We didn't exactly meet. But—I—we—" stammered the girl, wishing for some reason which she could not easily have defined that Lady Desmond might not recall that day at Claridge's. "I saw you once somewhere, at quite a distance. I didn't think, though, that you saw us. You didn't seem to look at us at all."

"One doesn't seem to look at people, does one, unless one knows them?" said Lady Desmond. "When I was a small girl, I was brought up to act as if everyone I hadn't met was a chair or a table, weren't you?"

"No," confessed Dolores, embarrassed. "I was never told anything like that. I've always liked to look at people, and make up histories about them."

"Did you make up a history about me?" Lady Desmond still smiled; but her eyes looked more green than gray.

"No-o. But I was interested, of course."

"How nice! One likes to feel one has the power to interest strangers."

"Even though you mustn't let them think you see them?" And now it was Dolores who smiled, though she felt a child in the hands of the woman.

"Yes, because one does see them—if they're worth seeing.

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I saw you—though I can't remember where it was. But that's a mere detail. I've remembered you, since—now tell me, since when?"

- "I think—it was one day—at Claridge's Hotel in London."
- "Oh! It must have been the day my brother and his wife and I ran up to town for a day from Cowes—to see a doctor. Yes. It comes back to me now. You were—you were in the hall when—" she stopped, and looked straight at Dolores. "When we were having tea," she finished.
- "Yes," assented the girl, relieved. But the strain was not over yet.
- "My brother had been rather seedy," Lady Desmond went on. "Mona—his wife—was worried about him and we had no rest till he consented to see a doctor. She worships him, you see. People have a way of worshiping my brother. Did you notice him?"
 - "Yes. I thought he was your brother."
- "You actually thought about us? How sweet of you. We're rather alike, people say, my brother and I."
 - "Very much. Only he's so much older."
- "He has had trouble. I suppose you know—that he would have had this place when the—late owner died, if the entail hadn't been broken?"

Dolores started a little. "No, I didn't know."

Lady Desmond looked at her intently. "I thought you surely would. Well, it ought to have been his. But he got the other family estate. It's not half as beautiful as this, though in some ways it's more valuable. Still, now I've seen you here, I don't grudge you Queen's Quadrangles. And your name is Eliot, too. Are we related, I wonder?"

The girl's face flushed. "I don't know. Were you—was your name Eliot?"

"My name was Vane. That is my brother's name. We are cousins, distant ones, of—the people here."

"Of Lady Rosamund?"

"Of her dead husband. But he died before I can remember much. I wouldn't have come to this house to-day if it hadn't been for you. And you may take that as a compliment, Miss Eliot. I'm perfectly certain that everybody who has happened to find out that I'm calling here is at this minute saying to some one else that Nina Desmond has the most horribly bad taste. But fortunately I don't care much what people say—especially people here; except you. I'm not sure that I shan't rather care about you."

Dolores blushed brightly, though whether with more of pleasure or embarrassment she could not have said.

"I don't understand why anybody should think it bad taste in you to come," she hurried to say. "I think it's very nice."

"That is pretty of you. But you don't seem to know as much as I—fancied you might, about—the circumstances. However, if there are any lions in my path, I always make a point of bearding them in their dens. St. John de Grey begged hard that I would come, and—wake up the county a little. (I can do that, you know, because I'm rather less dull and conventional than most of the people about here.) But if he hadn't begged as hard as he did, I should still very likely have come. I never was at Queen's Quadrangles before, though my brother used to visit here. Really, I'm tremendously interested. I should like it immensely if you'd be my guide and show me the house. It must be rather wonderful, judging by this."

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- "I should love showing it," exclaimed Dolores, quite off her guard now.
- "Thank you. I'll explain to Mrs. Eliot. I suppose there's no danger of our meeting Lady Rosamund Vane-Eliot if we start on a tour of inspection? I don't think even I should quite dare face that. Tillingbourne says she's supposed to be acting as your housekeeper. Is it true?"
 - "Yes. She wanted it to be so," said the girl.
- "How extremely quaint! And did you take Queen's Quadrangles because you, too, were Eliots?"
- "No, we hadn't heard about—that there were Vane-Eliots here then. We—we went to an agent." Dolores hurried over this truthful but abbreviated explanation, as she thought, for both their sakes, it might not be agreeable to have Lady Desmond find out about the cut copy of Country Life. As it was, she was not at all confident that the elder woman did not guess at something kept back, or that she was not trying to discover what at present she could only suspect.

Now, there was no longer a mystery in that little scene with the illustrated paper, in the hall of Claridge's Hotel. The brother and sister had been interested in the advertisement because they felt that Queen's Quadrangles ought to have come to their branch of the family, and they had doubtless felt vexed at seeing the place to let. Yes, that was it; and no other reason was needed, Dolores told herself. Yet she felt dimly that there had been something else, something which would account for an emotion stronger than mere interest, stronger than pique or disappointment.

When Lord Tillingbourne heard that Miss Eliot was to play cicerone to Lady Desmond, he asked if he might not be personally conducted, too; and it ended in the whole party

making a tour of the house. Lady Desmond had seemed not at all averse to Tillingbourne's proposal, but a slight change of countenance showed that she was not quite pleased to have Captain de Grey join the expedition. Evidently she had hoped that he and Mrs. Eliot would wait together in the fountain court until the three explorers should see fit to return. And this appeared a little odd to Dolores, because St. John de Grey and Lady Desmond were supposed to be very good friends. The lady admitted frankly that she had proposed this sudden visit to the duke with the idea of pleasing St. John; and it was St. John, not Tillingbourne, whose doings she seemed to watch, whose voice she seemed to hear, even when he was not speaking to her. Nevertheless, it was Tillingbourne whom she contrived to keep near her and Dolores, as they went from room to room of the house, St. John walking with Mrs. Eliot, talking to Mrs. Eliot.

Lady Desmond (whom Tillingbourne and De Grey both addressed as "Nina") expressed great admiration of Queen's Quadrangles, of which she visited nearly every room, except Lady Rosamund's quarters, and the servants'. "If I say I don't grudge you the place, it's saying a great deal," she remarked at last to Frances and Dolores, with a faint flash of the famous smile. "If it were my brother Paul's, you know, as it ought to have been, it would be almost the same as mine, because I should have insisted on visiting him often. Really, it's the most wonderful old house I ever saw. Still, I'm being very good and generous. I feel that you both fit in quite charmingly, and you're so appreciative of all the beauties that you deserve to have the place."

Frances expressed her gratitude for this tribute, and added

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that she would be delighted if Lady Desmond would come and stay at Queen's Quadrangles, in spite of the fact that justice had not been done to her brother.

"If Lady Rosamund were at the North Pole or somewhere even less remote, I'd take you at your word," she answered, with the almost defiant frankness of speech which was one of her characteristics (though only when convenient or amusing) if not an affectation. "I'm popularly supposed to be a horribly daring person. I generally do what I want to do, no matter what anybody may think—for what do people matter, unless you choose to let them? But—even I—with Lady Rosamund Vane-Eliot lurking somewhere in an awful background—no, I shouldn't be equal to it. It would give me—what's that other thing, besides appendicitis, you Americans are always having?—oh, nervous prostration, to live under the same roof with her. You know, she hates our branch of the family. You had better not tell her I've been in the house, unless you want a scene."

"We never do tell her anything," said Frances. "She won't let us. She persists in acting exactly as if she were an ordinary housekeeper, and never encourages any conversation when I see her in the mornings for a few minutes, except about household arrangements. It seemed awfully queer at first, but I'm beginning to get used to it now."

"What a strange woman!" exclaimed Nina Desmond. "This house is a kind of obsession with her. She was determined to get it for her own, and now, when she can't afford to keep it up, she clings to it still, no matter under what humiliating conditions."

"She doesn't appear to feel that they're humiliating," said Frances. "She—I can't describe what she's like, unless

it's a kind of captive queen, who is too proud even to show her pride, if you can understand what I mean."

"Things I've heard of her help me to understand, though we never met," answered Lady Desmond. "But it does seem rather hard on you that she should stick like a limpet, and spoil all the pleasure you might have had in being mistress here. Shocking bad taste, I call it. Can't you make her go?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Frances, almost horrified at such a crudely bold suggestion. "She lets Queen's Quadrangles only on condition that she stays as housekeeper."

"Too extraordinary of her, isn't it? Seems like madness. I can say this, you see, because one has a right to abuse one's relatives, hasn't one?—and as Lady Rosamund married her distant cousin, Sir Vane-Eliot, there's a little of the same blood in our veins—very little, though, I trust! Of course, you must know that silly people have stopped away from Queen's Quadrangles since you came, because she's in the house? If she'd had the decency to go it would have been very different for you."

"So Captain de Grey has hinted to me," Frances confessed. "It was very kind of him to give me some idea of the real reason, because I supposed that people must have a prejudice against us personally. As it is, we must just put up with it, and enjoy the dear, beautiful place as well as we can, without very much society."

"Oh, you'll have that, too, now," laughed Lady Desmond, looking rather wicked and very daring. "That's what I'm here for. Just at the moment, I happen to be rather the fashion. Do you think it's conceited of me to say that? It isn't, really. I don't care enough. Perhaps that's why people do things I choose to have them do. It's a great mistake to care

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much for anyone. I've found it so; and I avoid the mistake now—as a general thing."

As she said this her nonchalant smile faded for an instant, and the slanting, green-gray eyes looked to Dolores's fascinated gaze almost malevolent. But in a second she had herself well in hand again, and one might almost have thought the queer green flash a trick of the imagination.

"I know quite well what everybody will say," she went on.
"If Nina Desmond can make up her mind to enter that house, in spite of the connection, and the way her poor brother suffered, why, we can let bygones be bygones.' And they will. They'll come in their—dozens. But it won't really be to follow my good example. It will be to follow me. You've promised to come and bring Miss Eliot to the impromptu bridge dinner Tillingbourne and I are arranging for to-night (one must rush things if one has but four days to stop, and a lot to do with them), and on Monday there'll be that little dance I spoke of getting up—heaps of men will run over from Aldershot when I wire; and afterwards you'll find that you have the whole county to pick and choose from."

"I really do think you are kind!" exclaimed Frances. "I never knew anybody to be so kind. Why they say English people are stiff about getting acquainted, and I thought it was so; but I see now I misjudged the best ones."

In her innocent gratitude for this magnificent rescue, Frances did not see in the gray eyes a cold light of half-amused contempt, which their lovely owner hardly took the pains to hide. But Dolores saw, and wondered whether she could possibly be right in interpreting it as she did. Unless Lady Desmond had taken a fancy to her and her mother, why should she put herself to so much trouble on their account?

Of course, it was to please Captain de Grey, who really was kind; but would a fashionable woman, thoroughly aware of her own importance, actually bore herself for the sake of gratifying a friend—a man younger than herself?

Poor Dolores! she was very innocent of the world's ways. And even if she had seen Nina Desmond's face afterwards, when St. John de Grey was thanking her enthusiastically for what she had done, its expression might not have solved the mystery. Perhaps it would even have deepened it; for to Dolores's unawakened mind, no matter how handsome and attractive a woman might be, if she were a widow, over thirty, it was scarcely credible that she should feel other than a motherly or sisterly interest in a man of twenty-eight.

Besides, Lady Desmond had said that she did not let herself care much for anything or anybody nowadays; so the girl of nineteen supposed that this fascinating woman's romance was all in the past—buried in her dead husband's grave, perhaps.

Dolores had never read Balzac, and did not know that only the last love of a woman burns fiercely enough to satisfy the first love of a man.

As for Frances, she had not seen the look which answered her little burst of gratitude, and she took the things that she liked comfortably for granted after the first joyful surprise. One of the things she liked best, though she did not know it herself, was the Duke of Bridgewater's visiting card, which his son had brought. She had never seen the visiting card of a duke before, and she was childlike enough at forty to like having it on her table.

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If he had not had neuralgia, on account of that horrid notice of his book, he would have called. Frances was not snobbish, but she did not see anything at all funny in that attack of neuralgia, and she was sure that she would like the duke's latest novel, which she intended to buy immediately.

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A GHOST PICTURE

HERE was music at the duke's on Sunday evening. Lord Tillingbourne had wired to London and brought down a famous singer, also a violinist. This was another excuse to lure the Eliots to Tillingbourne Court; and then came the informal dance on Monday, which developed into a cotillon, with charming favors, bridge being played by older people.

Meanwhile the duke had more or less recovered from the force of the blow he had received; and on learning from Lady Desmond that little Mrs. Eliot had just read and was enormously impressed with his novel on slum life, he found himself well enough to call at Queen's Quadrangles, with Tillingbourne, on Monday afternoon.

That made things pleasanter all round, as Frances said, and she was won by the duke's thinness and air of extreme delicacy. They talked about books, and about digestion. Frances promised to give the duke a wonderful cure for neuralgia, and the duke promised to give her a copy of his novel before last with his name written in it.

While he and Tillingbourne were in the house, Lord and Lady Chilford came to call, and later Mrs. Calendar; so St. John's plan was turning out a great success; and he was not half as well satisfied with his triumph as he had expected to be.

Nina Desmond had done all he had asked of her, and a

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great deal more. He had never fully realized what a sweet, kind-hearted woman she was; indeed, he had never thought of those particular virtues in connection with the brilliant lady who honored him with signs of her friendship until now, when she made him see her in a new light at Tillingbourne Court. Nevertheless, in spite of her goodness to him in connection with the Eliots, it seemed to be invariably Tillingbourne who scored; and this was a disagreeable surprise to St. John, because, when begging Nina Desmond to propose a visit to the duke, he had not taken Tillingbourne into consideration.

To be sure, he had heard from Mrs. Calendar, at the Miss Greenleaf's, that the important young man intended running down on a short leave; but Tillingbourne had never found much time to waste on girls in his own class. Occasionally he condescended to flirt with some pretty married woman, if she were not too exacting; but if he had ever shown any signs of being seriously smitten it was an actress who won the triumph.

It had not occurred to St. John that Tillingbourne might be attracted by Dolores Eliot; but the unexpected had happened, and his carefully laid plan seemed to be working out far more to the profit of another than to his own advantage.

Even at the dance, St. John had comparatively little chance with Dolores, and was obliged to seek consolation in Nina Desmond's kindness. When he did get the girl to himself, he found her slightly absent-minded, and wondered jealously if she were thinking of Tillingbourne. The duke's only son was undoubtedly a better match than he; and Nina said that—though Dolores Eliot might be quite an exception—all other American girls she had ever met thought everything of a title. In fact, according to Nina, it was considered rather a

faux-pas in a girl from the other side, to marry an Englishman who was not at least a marquis.

Perhaps if St. John had known the real cause of Dolores's preoccupation when in his society he would hardly have been better pleased, for it is no great compliment to a man that a girl's thoughts should stray from him to a ghost, an anomalous being with no recognized existence. Yet so it was. The delights of her first grown-up dance were wasted upon Dolores because she was thinking of a ghost.

Four nights had passed since she had been able to visit the lost court and the tragic wraith whose haunt it was; and because she thought always of that wraith, the pleasant things she ought to have enjoyed merely bored her.

She had to go to the dinner, and the music, and the dance, and a few weeks ago they would all have been exciting events. She had to help her mother give a return at Queen's Quadrangles (that dinner of which Lady Rosamund heard in advance with a face absolutely expressionless); she had to be nice to the callers who came, and ought to have come long before; indeed, there seemed something for her to do with every hour until a late bedtime. And instead of being enchanted with the change, as Frances was, the girl was restless and distrait.

The night after the dinner at Queen's Quadrangles, her mother came to her room and "talked things over," far from guessing that Dolores did not share her interest in their little social successes. When Frances realized at last that it was very late and that they ought both to have been asleep ages ago, midnight was too long past for a visit to the lost court to be possible.

The next day, however, Lady Desmond and the half dozen

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friends she had brought with her went away, bound for Scotland, where they would stay until October 1st. Then Lady Desmond was to be at her flat in town for a few days before beginning a round of country-house visits, one of which was to be at the Duke of Bridgewater's again. Frances and Dolores were to lunch with her on one of those days in London; and then, when she came down into Surrey a little later, she promised to bring more pleasant people to Queen's Quadrangles.

Already Frances began to occupy herself with the thought of a ball that she would give when Lady Desmond was again in the neighborhood; something quite out of the common it must be, to make people want to come: fancy dress, perhaps, and a wonderful cotillon. Lord Tillingbourne—who was staying on with his father for a day or two—and Captain de Grey would advise her what to do.

They both came to play tennis in the afternoon, but fortunately for Dolores's wishes the evening was free, and Frances grew sleepy early. They had talked over so many things by this time that there was really little left to say, and Frances yielded to yawns. By half past ten the house was quiet, and before eleven Dolores was stealing across the lawn to the marble terrace.

After this long absence, seemingly neglect, she hardly dared to hope that the ghost would be waiting for her; and seeing no streak of light to remind her that the middle block of marble was a door, her first thought was that he had not cared to come to watch.

Down sank her heart, for if he were not here, there was no way for her to reach him. She dared not tap on the panel at the end of the long gallery, close as it was to Lady Rosa-

mund's door; and even if she did dare it would probably be useless, as a long passage lay between that hidden door and the exit from the room where the ghost had entertained her last. Of course it was possible that if he were in his room of books, he might hear her if she rapped on the wall in the book room behind the library; but should he hear, he could not be sure who knocked, and it would not be safe to call him.

For a moment she stood still on the platform, near the mooring place of the boats; then she would have turned away with a sigh if something had not moved in the gondola.

Dark as it was—for the moon rose late now—she saw a man's figure sit up and rise to its feet.

"Is it-you?" the girl asked, almost in a whisper.

"Yes, it's I," answered the voice which in her fancy she had never quite ceased to hear, like an undertone beneath the babble of other voices. "I was lying in the gondola—waiting. But I didn't hear you come."

"Oh, I'm so glad you're here!" Dolores exclaimed. "I was afraid you'd be disgusted with me and wouldn't care whether you ever saw me again or not."

He laughed. "Did you really think that? Well, I did care —so much that I've lain *perdu* here in the bottom of this gondola, hoping against hope, every night from ten o'clock till twelve."

He was out of the gondola now, standing beside her on the marble platform, the water washing close to their feet. His face was shadowed and indistinct in the darkness, but she saw how tall he was. She felt almost like a little girl beside him. Neither Lord Tillingbourne nor Captain de Grey was as tall as he, and both their figures seemed heavy as she contrasted them in her mind with his.

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"I can't bear to think of your waiting here in the night, and my not coming," she said. "I did want to come—more than anything else, but I couldn't get away. I hoped you'd understand that—yet I was afraid you mightn't."

"I did understand," the ghost answered. "Not that you wanted to come—why should you? But that, because you'd promised, and because you had such kind compassion on me, you would have come if you could."

"But, of course, I did want to," Dolores insisted. "I've thought—oh, such lots about you. I've kept asking myself if there was nothing I could do to help. I know you said there wasn't. But if we could talk it all over. Will you have me in to sit with you now for a few minutes, in—your house?"

"You make me feel quite a person of importance when you treat me as a host instead of the hunted, homeless shadow I've been for years. Yes, come if you will. I have no words which can tell you rightly how welcome you are in shadowland."

"Are you really glad to have me?" she asked, when he had led her into the little room of the Spanish pictures and hangings of brocade.

She was sitting in a big oak chair, resting her head contentedly against the high, carved back, and he looked at her for a moment without answering. His eyes were so somber that she was half frightened, wondering if, after all, he were going to tell her that on second thoughts it seemed better for her not to come.

"'Glad' is such a strange word to me," he said at last.

"It's so long since it's been in my vocabulary; but I find I haven't forgotten what it means. I think it means even more

than it used to, when I heard or spoke the word every day without attaching any particular importance to it. Glad! What a lot it does mean. Yes, I am glad to have you. But—I've been asking myself a few questions in these five days since I saw you last. Just how black is the blackness going to be when it folds me in again?"

"I don't understand," said Dolores.

"By and by-in a little while-you'll go away."

"From Queen's Quadrangles? Oh, no. We shall be here for years. At first mother thought she wouldn't like it in the winter. But now that lots of people are coming to see us, and asking us to go and see them, she feels differently. Only today she was asking me if I could be happy here all the year round. And I said yes; I couldn't be happy anywhere else, now I've grown to love the place so much."

"That isn't all I meant. You make plans—but fate will change them. You'll marry some man—"

"I—marry! Oh, no, I couldn't—I couldn't dream of it!"
Dolores was almost shocked. And then she was faintly surprised at herself and the curious repugnance roused in her by the sudden suggestion. She had not thought as much as many girls do about marriage, perhaps, because it was not for her an end and aim. She had her mother, and plenty of money; she would always have plenty of money, and could command the pleasant things of life; still, she had always supposed that some day she would fall in love and marry. She had even made up her mind what kind of man he must be who would win her to care for him. He must be tall and strong, but lean rather than stout—oh, above all things he must not be stout! Not too young; she was inclined to scorn boys, ex-

cept for tennis or a dance; not too old; with eyes that could

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make you feel, and a beautiful voice. But now—she was sure, perfectly sure, that she could never marry anyone. She could not bear even to think of having a husband.

"I wonder how soon some man will make you change your mind and take you away from—from Queen's Quadrangles?" said the ghost. But Dolores forgot to answer. Suddenly she had thought of something else far more important than distant marryings and givings in marriage.

"Oh, have you made me a sketch of yourself in the court?" she exclaimed abruptly.

He smiled. Who—even a ghost—could have helped smiling at such a question, as an answer to his?

"I'll show you what I've done," he said, getting up and going to the old carved table in the corner. Coming back, he brought the little water-color drawing of the lost court which he had made for her the other day. It was unaltered, except that a ghostly, transparent form sat on the marble seat, a form so diaphanous that the carvings on the marble showed through. Only the face was more than a mere dim suggestion. It was clear of outline, and the eyes looked straight into Dolores's eyes, as she eagerly bent over the sketch. The likeness was so good that the artist must have sat before a mirror while he painted, she thought. She was delighted with that likeness, but the cruel emphasis which insisted on a ghostly, immaterial existence stabbed her sharply.

"Oh, how could you make it like that?" she reproached him.

"I made myself as I am—a shadow," he said. "But perhaps it is rather ghastly. I'm sorry I had the bad taste to spoil the sketch"; and in another second he would have torn the paper across, had the girl not stopped him. With a little

cry she caught his hand; and then at the warm touch of it, she looked up at him, as if surprised.

Always, he had laid such stress upon the fact that he was a ghost, a cold wraith shivering outside of life, that somehow she had not thought of his hand being warm and strong, with the virile hardness that means muscle fed with hot, red blood.

Perhaps he read what was in her mind, for he flushed to his forehead, and without a word let her take the sketch from him.

"Never mind," she said. "I'll keep it as it is. And the face is splendid. I do thank you—very much. You haven't asked me to be careful that no one sees the sketch, and I thank you for that, too, because it shows you trust me. You may, you know."

"I do know. But don't thank me—for anything. It isn't right. You have nothing to thank me for—just the contrary. I oughtn't to let you come here."

"Why?" she asked, her eyes clouding.

"Because—" he looked at the expectant, childlike face, so sensitive, and so absolutely innocent that he could not finish what he had begun to say. "I ought not; that's all," he said.

"You didn't invite me to come at first," Dolores reminded him. "You found me here. And—I think I offered to come again, if you wanted me. If you don't——"

"Oh, you know I do!" his voice had something like anger in it, but Dolores was not frightened.

"Then," she said, "it's settled, and we needn't bother to talk about it any more, because I'm coming—often. I should be unhappy if you wouldn't let me come."

It did not strike her that she was not talking to the lonely

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master of the lost court as a girl is supposed to talk to a man. She could not have told St. John de Grey or Lord Tilling-bourne that it would make her unhappy not to see them, even if it were the truth. Yet to this one she spoke frankly, as she felt. But then, he was a ghost. He said that he was a ghost.

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THE QUESTION OF A DOG

HEN Dolores came to look by daylight at the sketch of the ghost in the lost court, it seemed to her that the likeness was even more perfect than she had thought. But the shadowy outlines of the body in the old-fashioned clothes (she had noticed other men's things, and knew now that they were old fashioned) and the intentionally given effect of unreality disturbed her. She was half minded to cut out the face and put it in a frame, but the whole sketch was so perfect as a work of art that she would have been loath to destroy it, even if she had not valued it because of the giver.

"I will make a copy," she said to herself. "Just the face, and I'll put it in a locket which nobody shall ever see."

But she had given away her paint box, and had to wait until another, for which she promptly sent to London, should arrive. At the same time she ordered a supply of canvas, an easel, oil paints, and brushes, and all the necessary paraphernalia for an artist. Then she could hardly wait until the things should be in her hands; but at last they came, and the girl at once set to work at copying the face of the ghost on a small square of ivory which she had bought.

She found it a more difficult task than she had expected, for though she had a talent at catching likenesses, this one was elusive; besides, she cared too much.

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Until she had seen this presentment of it on paper, she had not quite realized how extraordinarily attractive the face of the ghost was. The artist had not flattered himself in the sketch; rather had he done himself less than justice, but in trying to copy the features, Dolores saw how good to look upon they were. And the eyes, gazing straight into hers, made little pulses throb in her fingers as she held her paint brush.

She made several unsuccessful attempts, and at last was reduced to the inartistic expedient of laying the sketch on the window pane, with a sheet of water-color paper on it. Having then lightly drawn the outlines with a pencil, she was afterwards able to evolve a result which satisfied her more or less.

Having succeeded at last, more or less to her satisfaction, she motored that same afternoon into Daleford, attended by Parker, the maid brought down from London, and found at a jewelry shop a simple, open-faced locket, with a long, thin gold chain.

She had not been entirely pleased with her attempt at miniature painting, but when she saw the handsome face looking out at her from under glass the work seemed less amateurish, and Dolores was delighted. Over her head went the thin chain to be hidden under her bodice; and when she dressed for dinner that evening she slipped it down so that it lay concealed in the lace round her shoulders. As for the locket, that was well out of sight; but she was conscious of its presence, and somehow the happier for it.

If she had had to account for her happiness, she would have honestly hesitated, unable to define the feeling; then she would have said—and meant it—that she felt the ghost needed a friend who thought of him always, to whom he

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was important; and she was happy because she was that friend.

Almost every night she saw him, sometimes only for five or ten minutes, standing on the platform at the foot of the terrace or sitting in the gondola; sometimes for half an hour in his own mysterious domain. She told him of things that happened in the outside world, but she did not talk of Lady Desmond's visit. She had waited for him to mention that name again, if he chose, knowing, as he did, that the lady who bore it was expected at Tillingbourne Court; but he did not choose, and so Dolores kept silence concerning the woman whose namesake he had known before he was a ghost.

He questioned her about others, however, and seemed driven by an almost morbid curiosity to learn every detail he could extort concerning the Eliots' growing friendship with St. John de Grey and Lord Tillingbourne.

Dolores saw that her stories of tennis and motor picnics cast him into the depths of gloom, and accounted for his change of mood by reminding herself that he was in prison. It must be terrible to hear of the outdoor amusements of men in the world which were not for him; yet he would have her recount the doings of every day.

- "Why, why do you make me talk to you of these things?" she asked once.
 - "Because it's good discipline for me," he answered.
- "Can't you get away from this prison life?" she went on, desperate in her sympathy for him. "I don't know why you came here or why you stay; I don't ask to know, because you don't want me to, even though we're friends now. But there must be some way of escape. I could help you, maybe. If you wanted to disguise yourself, I could——"

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"I do not want that," he broke in. "I've thought of it, of course, but as I told you at first, it's not possible. There are reasons."

"Mightn't you be happy in some far-off country, if once you could get there?" she persisted.

"No. I'm out of the world, now and forever," he answered. "When I said to you that I had died long ago, I wasn't speaking figuratively. I am dead, and there's no resurrection for me. Don't let us talk of what can't be, or I shall forget the blessings I have. You are one; and there's one other."

As he said that he glanced up at the portrait on the wall—the portrait of the beautiful young girl who smiled down at him from the canvas; and Dolores was stabbed by a strange little pang, such as she had never felt before. He put her first as a blessing, at least in words; but there was a passion of love in the dark, tragic eyes as they dwelt on the portrait.

That very night she had half meant to tell him about the copy she had made from his sketch, and how—because they were such friends—she wore his face in a locket. She had thought it might please him who had so few pleasures to know that, even when his friend was with others, she had always a talisman very near her to remind her of him. But when she saw his face as he looked at the lovely girl in the portrait she shrank from telling her little secret. Perhaps that picture was his talisman. Maybe the original was living somewhere in the world now, thinking of him, and he of her. And if that were true, no new friend could be to him of supreme importance.

He never asked her questions about those who lived in the house; about Lady Rosamund, or the old servants, or anything that made up the daily routine of the household; but

he encouraged Dolores to talk of her acquaintances outside; and he seemed to enjoy hearing about Miss Poppy and Miss Peachy Greenleaf, the two old ladies of Turk's Cottage.

They had not changed their minds as others had since the advent of Lady Desmond. The fact that the duke had decided to forget Queen's Quadrangles's past, and "take up" its new tenants, had not sent them flying to call, as it had others. They did not come; but Dolores went to them, and Frances went, too, after hearing much of them from her daughter. Dolores had grown fond of the old ladies, and when she found that anecdotes of the Misses Greenleaf's quaint little ways amused the ghost, she made a point of collecting a fund of them for his benefit.

She had begun to study Spanish, which she had always meant to learn, and when she had more than half an hour to give him, he sometimes helped her with it, for he knew the language well. By day, though he said nothing to her of those lonely hours, he must have painted a good deal with the new oil paints Dolores had bought him, for at night he showed her a picture as it grew. He said that it was bad because he had to work without models, but it seemed wonderful to the girl; and she blessed it for more than its artistic worth, because something (she supposed it was this painting taken up again) was giving the ghost an interest in life—or that pale substitute for life which was his all. His eyes were not always tragic now, and his voice had lost that curious unreality, that deadness of tone which had pained her at first.

So a fortnight passed; and a new code was established between the two. When she had hoped to see him, and found out during the day that she could not, at half past seven, just before dressing for dinner, she went into the bookroom behind

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the library as if to find a book. Then, removing three or four volumes from a shelf, she would tap three times, as hard as she dared. The ghost, on the other side in his own hidden room of books, removed from her in that secret place only by the thickness of two oak partitions, heard and answered.

He was always there at that hour, in order to learn his fate; but that was not all. Occasionally, for some reason which he never explained, he was unable to receive a visitor in the lost court. When he knew that the mysterious thing which must keep him from his friend was about to happen, he tapped on his side of the wall five times; so that even if she had no bad news to communicate, Dolores went into the bookroom each evening at the same hour.

Only twice or thrice in the fortnight did she receive the adverse signal, but, having been warned that it might come and what it would mean, she was extraordinarily depressed by it. In his hermit existence, where one day was as another, blank and empty save for his own thoughts, what could come to disturb the tenor of the prisoner's ways?

It was impossible for her to put such a question to him, and she tried to banish it from her own mind, but it would come, and come again, forcing her to realize how little she knew of the man who called himself a ghost. Not only had he some great secret to hide, but he was himself a part of that secret; his existence was a secret, the place where he lived was a secret. And nothing of it all did she know save that he was there in the hidden court, a fact which she had found out by accident; and since discovering it she had learned no more.

She did not even know if he were quite alone in his prison. Being in reality a man, and not a ghost, he must have food and drink, and since he could not come out to get them for

himself, obviously he must be served by some one. It occurred to the girl, when she thought of these things, that possibly he had a servant who went out at night to fetch supplies. There were several rooms above those she had seen in the lost court, and a servant might live there without his existence being known to her. But it was only when the mysterious necessity for his complete seclusion arose that Dolores realized to the full how strange was that hidden existence, now become so important to her. At other times she half forgot the mystery of it, as her new friendship became more and more an essential part of her life. Nevertheless, going to the lost court was to her always like going into a dream; the return, like waking up to realities comparatively commonplace.

Then, at the end of the fortnight, came the 1st of October, and news of Lady Desmond's return from Scotland. She wrote to say that she was about to arrive at her flat in town, and would be delighted if, instead of coming only to lunch, as they had planned, Mrs. Eliot would bring her daughter to dine and stop the night. They would have dinner early and "do a theater," for several quite amusing new plays were now on. Lord Tillingbourne—who had left his father's house in Surrey and gone back to duty—would be asked, and would certainly accept, even if he had to break another engagement or two.

Frances was charmed with the invitation, principally for Dolores's sake, though she thought that she, too, would enjoy a gay little dinner and a play in the society of pleasant people. She proposed that, if they amused themselves in town, they might stay on for a night or two more taking rooms at Claridge's, and perhaps arranging a luncheon or a dinner of their own. Besides, they must be thinking of the fancy-dress

dance, which she had now quite decided to give when Lady Desmond should be again in Surrey. She must consult the best caterers and florists, and there were costumes to be chosen for herself and her daughter. It was useless for Dolores to say it would be better to put off having such an entertainment until another year. They knew quantities of people now—everybody there was to know; and Lady Desmond would see that there were plenty of dancing men.

The little woman would have been surprised indeed could she have known how indifferent Dolores was to the prospect of giving a dance, how dismayed the girl felt at being torn away from Queen's Quadrangles for two or three days.

"I wonder if he'll care—if he will miss me?" Dolores asked herself; but the question was answered that night. She saw him and told him; and it was plain that he did care. His face was utterly blank for a moment, and the light—that new-kindled light of interest in things—went out of his eyes.

"Oh—you're going away—for days," he said. "Well—I ought to be glad. It's dull for you at Queen's Quadrangles. But I'm not glad. I've grown so selfish that I want you always here. I need you—my little friend."

"I'd stay if I could," she protested. "I only-"

"No. You mustn't say that. I mustn't let you say it—or feel it," he broke in. "I'm nothing—I can be nothing—in your life. And that's best. Enjoy things all you can, and for Heaven's sake don't let me or thoughts of me come between you and pleasure. I'd be a brute indeed if I wanted that; and it's even worse to be a brute than a ghost."

Then he had gone on to say that she must be happy in London, and if she thought of him at all, think only how glad he should be to see her when she came back. But her heart

was troubled. She had wanted him to be sorry that she was going; yet now, when she saw how sorry he really was, she felt almost sick with remorse.

She had brought brightness into his prison. She had long been sure of that, but she knew now something more of what it had been to him, and how he would feel when the brightness was gone. If only she could think of anything to make the time pass for him while she was away!

Books she had brought him; but he had many books already. He seemed to have read all the best books in the world. Flowers would soon fade. What was there, then, that she could give?

Suddenly she thought of a dog. Why should she not buy him a dog and smuggle it in to him the night before she went away? She wondered that the idea had never come to her before, and she welcomed it excitedly, as an inspiration.

He would be sure to love a dog, and she saw no reason why he should not have one. It could go out at night and run about a little; then, by day, it would be contented to stop with its master in the lost court and be his dear companion.

Dolores was devoted to dogs, and had lately adopted a spaniel belonging to one of the old gardeners who had been employed at Queen's Quadrangles when the Eliots arrived. Captain de Grey had assured her that the animal was a fine dog, worth having, and had added that there was a man living within a few miles of Clere who bred spaniels. He had got Toddles from him. The gardener had not bought his dog of this person, but an ancestor of the animal's had come from those kennels; and when the old man had given Dolores this piece of information, some memory had come up which apparently saddened him, making him very thoughtful, and turn-

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ing his nose suddenly red. Perhaps, the girl said to herself, the poor fellow had dearly loved the spaniel, who had maybe died in some tragic way, so that he could scarcely bear to be reminded of his sorrow even now.

Her inspiration at once recalled this conversation concerning the breeder who still existed in the neighborhood of Clere. She did not question St. John de Grey, because she had a dim idea that the ghost would not care to associate his dog with De Grey, but with her only. And somehow, she thought that she would like that better herself. But she had a talk with the old gardener, and learned where the kennels were to be found.

The next thing was to get a dog, and hide him somewhere until night came, when he could be introduced into the lost court.

The girl had great liberty of action in the country, more liberty than an English girl, placed as she was, would have had, perhaps; and Frances made no objections to her taking a long, solitary stroll now and then, provided she promised to avoid all lonely byways.

The kennels were within walking distance, and as luck would have it, there was a litter of adorable brown puppies, not yet three months old. Never, it seemed to Dolores, could there have been anything more beautiful than those little animals, with their silky coats and their loving eyes. She bought one which seemed to her the most engaging of all, and was glad that it was quite expensive. Then, with joy in her heart, she led the little creature away, tied to a string, but gayly inclined to accompany her, and wagging all the way.

Neither of the two lodges at Queen's Quadrangles had been occupied when the Eliots first took the place; but now a re-

spectable and respectful family was established in the principal one. Their gate Dolores avoided to-day, and no one saw her enter the park followed by a cheerful spaniel puppy. She took it into an old summerhouse, which apparently had once been used as a playroom by some small Vane-Eliot boy, and still contained a few of his battered toys. There was a door which locked, though it was not kept fastened, and Dolores was able to secure it and carry away the key.

It did seem a shame to shut the dog up and leave it alone, but she had prepared the place for his reception, with a dish of puppy biscuit soaked in milk and a bed made of an old rug. Besides, it was six o'clock when she returned with her prize; and in less than five hours more she hoped that she might make the presentation.

The one danger was that she should receive an adverse signal when the time came to visit the bookroom. If she were not to visit the lost court that night she would not be able to see the ghost until she returned from London, so her heart beat very fast when she gave the single tap, which was her way of announcing that all was well.

One answering knock came back, and she sighed with relief, for the tension of suspense had been great.

The puppy was in her arms when she was admitted by the door under the marble terrace at half past ten that night, and was hidden beneath the cape of her long cloak.

"You have come to bid me good-by," said the ghost, when he had led her to the room of the Spanish pictures, where the two usually sat together.

"Yes, for a little while," she answered. "But see what I've brought to keep you company while I'm gone." So saying, she lifted her cape and showed the puppy, who, having been

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torn from sleep, was blinking innocently and adorably. "This is a present from me—for you to remember me by."

"A present for me—to remember you by," the ghost said after her; and a charming expression lit up his face for a moment, as he patted the dog's brown head, and a pink tongue came gratefully out to lick his wrist. Smiling, and looking younger than she had ever seen him look, he took the puppy from her arms. Setting it on the floor, he sat down and called it to him. In another instant the lively little creature was up and sprawling across his knees.

"This rolls away the years!" he exclaimed. "I had a dog once—well, I won't trust myself to talk of him even to you, for I—when I was taken from the world I had to leave him, and he was about the best pal I ever had. This little chap is the image of him when I had him first. Curious! It's almost as if you knew. But you didn't know, did you?"

Dolores had perched on the arm of a sofa, close by the chair where the man sat with the dog on his lap. Her hand, too, rested on the puppy's brown head, and the ghost could easily have touched it, as if by accident. But he did not. He only looked at it as a poor woman who worships jewels might look at a string of somebody else's pearls, just within his reach.

"I think I must have known by intuition," the girl answered. "I felt you would like to have this dog, more than any other one I saw. Besides, he seemed to want to come, as if he knew, too. Altogether, it must have been meant. I'm so glad you love him."

"I do love him, for his little, quaint self, and for my dear old friend lost long ago," said the ghost. "And I thank you for him—more still for the thought that prompted you to get him for me. But just because I do love the poor little

fellow, I'm going to do a very hard thing—I can think of only one thing that would be harder for me to do."

"Oh, what is it?" cried Dolores, distressed and bewildered.

"I'm going to ask you to take your present back."

The girl's happy face fell, and disappointment sent the blood to her cheeks. "You don't want him, after all?" she asked heavily.

- "I do want him-want him most horribly."
- "Then why—why won't you keep him? Are you afraid he'd give you trouble, or get you into danger by making a noise? You needn't be, truly, because the man I bought him of says he's the best little creature in the world, used to playing about the house with children, although he's so young; and he never barks. The man says he doesn't believe he knows how."
- "Poor chap, let him live where he can learn to use his voice, and needn't be suppressed into sadness and silence, like the master you'd give him to, my little friend. No, I can't keep him. It would be cruel. He would be wretched here, with no freedom, no joy of life. He'd be miserable, and would fall ill. I couldn't stand that."
- "He'd grow too fond of you to be miserable—and you could take him out at night," Dolores pleaded.
 - "What an existence for a dog!"
 - "You lead it, and you're a man."
- "I lead it because I must. And I've exchanged manhood for ghosthood. You mustn't forget that; God knows, I don't!"
 - "Oh, I am disappointed!" cried the girl, very downcast.
- "That's one thing which makes it so hard to give up the dog-worse even than the giving up itself, though I-it

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would have been a lot to me to own the little beast and have him by me. It would have made some sunshine; but he needs a lot more of that than I can give him here. Don't you understand? But I know you do."

"Yes, I understand," said Dolores. "And I like you all the better for it, in my heart," she might have added; yet she did not. When she had first known him, and no more personal human feeling had grown up out of her vast sympathy for him, she would have said such things as that. But she was more shy with him now than she had been. Perhaps it was just as well for him to remind her that she must not forget he was a ghost. Sometimes she did forget, for long minutes at a time.

- "If you understand, you aren't hurt?"
- "Oh, no, only grieved, and for you, not myself. I thought it would do you good to have a dog."
- "So it would, but I'd rather do the dog good. I'm—almost used to things, and he never would be. I don't give you back your present, I only ask you to keep it for me."
 - "Is there nothing I could bring you instead?"
- "Yourself—no, I oughtn't to say that. I unsay it. You're not to think, ever, that you need to come here and waste hours that otherwise might be sweet on a sick man."
 - "You're not sick, are you?"
- "My soul is sometimes, I'm afraid, though I try not let it be. I say to myself that I have myself; and a man who has himself ought to have all of life, because life is lived in the soul, no matter what surroundings there may be, and so, if I keep my soul's garden well planted and weeded, I can have—what should be enough."
 - "And isn't it enough?" the girl softly asked.

As he talked he had been fondling the dog, curled sleepily upon his knee, but suddenly he stopped, looking up, and their eyes met.

Dolores did not know how to read what his said to her. But whatever they said, they seemed to try to unsay it again next instant, in repentance and pain. For just one breathing space the soul he had spoken of looked straight into hers; then a veil dropped.

"It wouldn't be enough for this chap," he said, smiling with quiet sadness, which might be resignation, or the result of a terrible self-control. "He wants another sort of garden—with you to play with him in it. Perhaps sometimes you'll bring him to see me and pay a short call."

She could not speak. She had a very curious sensation as if her heart were trembling. That look of his! What had it meant? What had it taught her of herself? She did not know.

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A BOX AT THE THEATER

HE addition of a spaniel puppy to the household was a detail of no importance except to Dolores Eliot, and since she was to keep him, she hated to go away and leave the little creature just as he was beginning to grow fond of her. But the visit to Lady Desmond had to be made.

Frances thought that it would do the girl good. Dolores had seemed to her unusually dreamy for many weeks, but the morning of the day fixed for the start to London she looked ill, or if not ill, curiously fragile—almost unreal.

"Don't you sleep well, Lolita?" Frances asked, sitting in Dolores's room while Parker packed pretty things for town.

"Yes," said Dolores, not thinking it necessary to mention that last night had been an exception, as she had hardly slept at all, owing to that wonderful, half joyous, half terrible trembling in her breast. Her heart felt like a bird in prison, and as if it were trying to sing of mystery and sweetness.

"You come up to bed early most nights," Frances went on, looking critically at the girl's great luminous eyes, and the pearly skin which had not as much color as it used to have. "I suppose you don't sit up reading, do you?"

"No," answered Dolores, blushing. "I don't often read after I come upstairs."

"Well, anyhow, you have the air of not getting enough

sleep," persisted Frances. "I don't suppose we'll be in our beds very early at Lady Desmond's, still it will be a change staying with her, and will wake you out of those day-dreams of yours, that you seem to be having half the time. If you don't get back your color and have a better appetite, I don't know what I shall do with you. Perhaps I'll take you to Scotland, or some bracing mountain place for a while."

"Oh, no, I don't want to go anywhere," Dolores exclaimed hastily. "I'm very well and—and perfectly happy."

Frances said no more; but now and then she threw a sly little wondering glance at her daughter. Perfectly happy! And she ate next to nothing, and had a look in her eyes as if she saw into another world. These were symptoms which might, after all, be attributed to something besides a disturbed state of health. Girls in love were said to be like that. As for herself, she had kept her appetite, and she had not had that wonderful look when she began to care for the man she afterwards married; but Dolores could be happier or unhappier about things than, thank goodness, she had ever felt the capacity for being.

They went up to town in the motor, Parker traveling by train with the luggage—a good deal of luggage for so short a stay, but Frances had been rather particular about which dresses and how many her daughter should take.

Lady Desmond's flat made a perfect frame for its mistress, Dolores thought. It looked over the park, and there was great individuality in the choice of all the furniture and decorations. Lady Desmond gave the mother and daughter rooms adjoining, with walls lined with satinwood nearly as high as the ceiling, all the wardrobes and other fittings built into the wall, and made of the same beautiful wood. Dolores's room was

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hung with pale blue, and Mrs. Eliot's with the fresh, sweet green which goes best with satinwood. There were flowers in both; but in the girl's room, besides the roses which Lady Desmond had provided, were quantities of Parma violets tied with purple ribbon, and bearing Lord Tillingbourne's card.

"Marquis of Tillingbourne," Frances read over her daugh-

ter's shoulder, and was innocently proud.

"How did he know they were your favorites?" she inquired. "Did you ever tell him, or did he just guess?"

"I don't remember," the girl answered, wondering how she would be feeling if another man had sent her the flowers she loved best. "I think he did ask me once-quite a long time ago."

Evidently he had not a short memory when he cared to keep things in his mind, and that was a great compliment from a young man who appeared to be rather engrossed in his own interests. Besides, Lady Desmond said that Lord Tillingbourne, though not enormously rich, was considered so attractive and so good a match that girls and girls' mothers positively pestered him. Frances was glad that such things did not happen in America; and she told Dolores that, though she had better wear a few of the violets in the evening, as they would suit her dress, she need not put on many, lest he should be too pleased.

The dinner which had been suggested resolved itself into a festive meal given by Lord Tillingbourne himself at the Ritz; and he had taken a large box afterwards for a new play at the St. James's. He had asked two of his brother officers; one being a quiet, shy major, old enough to be a colonel, who was quite satisfied to talk to Mrs. Eliot, while the other had

been in love with Lady Desmond for months.

Tillingbourne wedged his chair very close to Dolores at the theater, saying that he hoped he didn't crowd her, and that she could see all right; but you never could give people elbow room in a box.

An American girl was the heroine of the play, and most of the men in the cast were supposed to be in love with her. Tillingbourne had read the dramatic criticisms, a thing he seldom troubled to do, and knew what happened; which was the reason why he had taken tickets for the St. James's, instead of choosing some musical comedy more suited to his own taste. Still, even had he not wished Dolores to see this play, when he came to scan them over, there was scarcely a musical comedy or light opera in London to which he would have taken her. He knew too many chorus girls, and some of the little beasts had the habit of looking up at one and making eyes.

But he was in love with Dolores, and had no interest, for the moment, in any other girl on the stage or off. She was so elusive, so sweet, yet so indifferent that he wanted to take her in his arms, holding her so tight as almost to crush the breath out of her body. As she sat gazing at the actors he stared at her as if he could have eaten her up, and at last he could stand it no longer.

"Don't look at them, look at me," he whispered. "Nothing much is happening down there just now, and a lot is happening here."

She glanced at him, smiling, but a little impatient, because she wanted to hear what the hero's mother was saying. "What is happening?" she whispered back.

"I'm going a little off my head."

"Dear me, I hope not! Are you bored?"

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"Rather not. That fellow down there isn't half as much in love with his American beauty as I am with mine. That's what I want—to have you for mine. You will marry me, won't you?"

Dolores was completely taken by surprise. If she had been an English girl, she would have known before this that Tillingbourne "meant business," because he generally fought shy of young unmarried women in his own class, lest they should think he had "intentions." Things that he had done and said and looked would long ago have prepared almost any girl for a proposal; and perhaps even Dolores might have guessed (although men in her own country could be "nice" to girls without feeling pledged to more than niceness) if she had had thoughts to spare for any man outside the lost court. As it was, it had never occurred to her that the Marquis of Tillingbourne cared about her except as a nice little girl to play with when there was nothing more exciting on hand.

"Oh, I couldn't!" she answered. "But—but surely you're joking, aren't you?"

"Never was as serious in my life," said Tillingbourne.

Neither of them knew that the curtain had just gone down on the second act, although Tillingbourne absent-mindedly and mechanically patted his hands together because everybody else was applauding. "I love you awfully, you know. You've got to say Yes. I never asked any other girl to do that before."

"Then I wish you would, please," said Dolores. "Because—it's no use with me."

Tillingbourne began to be anxious. The words were nothing. He supposed that most girls felt bound to say "No"

at first, especially American ones, who were so jolly independent, owing to the way their men spoiled them at home. But there was a grave finality about this girl's tone which began to worry him. He wished that he had not begun to talk about these things in the theater, for it would make it a little awkward afterwards if she stuck to her refusal all the evening; but he had not expected to have much trouble with her. He had thought she might "shy a bit" at first, just enough to make him more keen; but what did rich American girls come to stop in England for if not to pick up a title? As there wasn't a decent unmarried duke in the market at the moment, he was the best there was-without exception the best there was to be had. She was exquisite, but she ought to think herself jolly lucky. Of course he would get her in the end, but he wished to Heaven she'd say Yes and be done with it, so that he could get a little peace. He'd been feeling rather queer lately, and all her fault, too.

"Why isn't it any use with you?" he asked, trying to keep his patience.

"Because I don't love you," said Dolores.

"I'll make you love me," he whispered.

She shook her head. "You couldn't."

The blood rushed up to his crisp yellow hair, which other girls so much admired. "Is there somebody else?" he wanted to know, looking dangerous.

"Somebody else!" Dolores did not answer for a minute. Was there anybody else? A tight knot seemed to tie itself in her throat. "Oh, how I love him, how I love him!" a voice in her heart said. And a dreadful sadness swept over her. It came into her mind that she had nothing to live for.

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"Is there—is there?" insisted Tillingbourne.

She started. "I—I don't know. No. Of course, there's nobody. I can never marry anyone, that's all."

"Oh, if that's all!" exclaimed Tillingbourne, relieved, "I'm not afraid. Every right sort of girl says that.—What?"

"But I mean it."

She longed to run away, to be alone. This young man's crude lovemaking made her realize what it would be to have one she loved tell her that he loved her, too. And how he would tell it! How wonderful his eyes would look, how dear his voice would sound. She had not known before that she loved him in this way, though she had begun to feel—she hardly knew how she had begun to feel last night when their eyes met as she asked, "Isn't it enough?"

Strange that it should be Lord Tillingbourne who had shown her what was in her own heart—for another man! And that man? He said of himself that he was no man, but a ghost. He had no place in life; his very existence was a shadow existence, though it was the one real thing in the world for her. Yet that world was between them like an awful barrier. He had fallen over the edge of the world, and she could not follow. Because he was not in her life there could be no warm, happy future for her, as there was for other girls. She felt like one who has taken the veil and become a nun, only to find that Heaven will not hear her vows, that no convent will open its door to give her shelter.

And all this in the theater while the play went on.

"I'm going to teach you not to mean anything so cold and beastly," Tillingbourne was cheerfully saying. "I've always got things I wanted, and I want you—Jove! how I want you! I didn't know it was in me. All I know is that I've got to have you."

"Oh, please don't talk about this any more," Dolores begged. "I hate hearing it. It seems almost sacrilege, when—"

"When-what?"

"I can't explain. And anyway, the others will hear. I'm —going to listen to the play. You must listen, too."

Sulkily he obeyed and was silent.

He loved the girl all the more for her opposition, which he was determined to break, but at the same time he was angry with her for it, and it would have given him a thrill of pleasure to grasp the pretty bare shoulders and shake them, not gently, but very hard, making marks on the white skin, and leaving a throb in the temples as a warning that he must not be teased.

"I will have her!" he said to himself, and he was in a mood then to have said it even if he had not known for certain that she would come into more than a hundred thousand pounds on her marriage, not counting what would fall to her on the mother's death.

The three men were asked to supper at Lady Desmond's after the theater, and all accepted; but it was easy to see from Tillingbourne's manner that something had happened to upset him. Other people were not important enough in his scheme of existence for him to care about taking the trouble to hide his feelings. When he was sulky he would not talk, and his lower lip stood out a little; it always had in his "ugly" moods, since he had been a particularly disagreeable and spoiled child.

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Lady Desmond guessed that Dolores and he had had a misunderstanding, and when he was going she seized a chance—for she was clever at seizing chances—to ask what was wrong.

"She's refused me," answered Tillingbourne. "I'm going to make her do the other thing, though—before long, too. I can't stand this sort of rot. It's beastly."

"Don't worry," cooed Nina Desmond. "Girls must be allowed their airs and graces; but I'll have a word with her to-night."

"Oh, I suppose it will be all right," said Tillingbourne, "only it isn't pleasant. Let me know what she says to you, if you do have a talk, will you?"

"Of course," Lady Desmond soothed him, giving his hand a gentle little squeeze at parting.

The Eliots had been invited to town with the idea of bringing this affair off, and snatching Dolores away from St. John de Grey, out of his reach forever, as she would be the moment she became engaged to Lord Tillingbourne. It was a sickening disappointment to Dolores's hostess that her scheme should have miscarried so far; and though she encouraged Tillingbourne, she was anxious.

She had hoped that Tillingbourne's title, his position, and his looks might have won the American girl even if her first fancy had been captured by St. John's brown face and pleasant, unassuming ways. But those ways seemed so overwhelmingly attractive to Nina that she could the more readily grant the danger of their holding another woman, especially a romantic girl like Dolores.

Perhaps—she tried to reassure herself—Miss Eliot had only held back in a conventional way, or Tillingbourne had

been too abrupt. She would not go to bed, or let the girl go to bed, until she had found out something definite.

When the men had said good-night, Lady Desmond let Dolores slip away and kept Frances talking in the drawing-room.

"Poor Tillingbourne!" she said, in a low, confidential tone, when the girl was out of hearing. "I'm sorry for him, aren't you? Or perhaps you don't approve?"

Frances had retained in middle age a certain girlish shyness which made it hard for her to launch into intimate talk with comparative strangers, even when there was no secret to keep; but she could hardly pretend to misunderstand without appearing ungraciously reserved. "I—I suppose you think—that he's falling in love with Lolita?" she said, with a slight effort.

"Falling? Oh, he's fallen, very deep. I know—I don't think. We're old friends, and I'm a little in his confidence. I do hope for the poor boy's sake that you aren't against him?"

Her smile was so sweet and her manner so friendly, so cordially interested, that Frances's heart warmed, and she had an impulse toward friendliness.

"Not at all. I should rather like it if Lolita would care for him," she said. "He's very handsome; and of course in a worldly way he could offer her a good deal—though no more than she deserves, if I do say it."

"Not so much. She's so sweet, no wonder he's fallen in love—for the first time, seriously. But really, no girl could do much better. The duke's rather delicate, and——"

"Oh, I don't think of that!" broke in Frances, horrified.

"It's not necessary," murmured Lady Desmond, look-

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ing down to hide a different sort of smile, not quite so sweet. "The question is—I'm afraid she's been unkind to him."

"He did seem depressed," admitted Frances.

"He told me just before he went that she'd refused him. But I can't help hoping she didn't mean it. I like him so much, and he's so devoted to her. His whole heart's in it. Surely she must care for him a little?"

"I don't know," said Frances. "I like him, too, very much. But I wouldn't wish to influence her in any way. In my country we let girls make up their own minds."

"How irritating a prim little frump like this provincial American woman can be!" thought Nina Desmond, raging against the neat, slim creature who looked so small, so insignificant beside her. But outwardly she was all sympathy and kindness.

"How very right! How much unhappiness would be avoided if we were like that in all countries," she breathed devoutly. "Here, most of us marry to please somebody else, not ourselves. I married—to please my brother, and regretted it. But that's over now. Only my failure has made me believe all the more in the need for love. I can't help feeling strongly that poor Tillingbourne and your sweet lily of a girl were made for each other. I can't bear to see this idyll broken. Unless, of course—do forgive me if I'm intrusive, for I don't mean it—unless she cares for anyone else in the States or—here."

"I don't think she does," replied Frances gravely, not in the least guessing that she was being "pumped" by this great lady who was so gracious. "I did rather hope—" she broke off short, embarrassed.

"You hoped? Won't you let me know? I, too, have fallen in love with Dolores."

"Oh, nothing, really. It was a mere idea, I thought that Captain de Grey liked her—but, so far as I know, he has never said anything."

This was what Nina had feared, yet what she had been angling for. When she heard that in all probability he had not yet spoken, however, she was glad; and she wondered if a thing which she had said had taken effect. She had told him that Dolores seemed drawn at first sight to Tillingbourne, and that she feared she had been called too late to do him—St. John—much good with the girl.

"I dare say he does like her," she said softly now to Frances; "but he is very honorable. I don't believe he will ever say anything." Then, when Mrs. Eliot looked surprised, she went on as if reluctantly. "He was fond of a married woman a little while ago, and though there was nothing wrong, he got her rather talked about. She's awfully fond of him still, and though he may be tired of her, I don't think he'll feel it right to marry while she lives."

Frances looked shocked, and Lady Desmond was delighted with her own success. There was just enough basis of truth for the first part of the story to make it difficult for St. John to deny, if anything were said to him.

"May I sound your dear little girl, a tiny, tiny bit, to see what she thinks of Tillingbourne?" she coaxed. "If you did it, she might think you were anxious for her to marry him, and I quite see that wouldn't do. But with me—I should not be able to influence her, even if I tried, which I wouldn't dream of doing. Do let me just go to her room to say good-night—and a few other little things?"

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Frances could not refuse, nor did she wholly wish to refuse. It had been a blow to hear that story about St. John de Grey. He did not seem like that sort of man. But a woman could never tell. And Lord Tillingbourne was younger. Lady Desmond, who had know him for years, said that this was his first love. Perhaps it would be better if Lolita could care for him; and it would do no harm if an old friend of his said nice things about him to the child to-night.

So Lady Desmond knocked, and went into the pretty satin-wood room with its blue curtains, its softly shaded electric lights, and its scent of flowers. Dolores already had on her dressing gown, and her hair hung in a dark cloud over her shoulders and down below her waist. Nina Desmond looked at her enviously. She was so very young, and her smooth throat was like a slender column of alabaster. Nina's was beginning to be less firm than it had been, and she bound cosmetic things round it at night. Also she had her maid rub a dressing into her hair to keep it from falling out. She hated youth—other women's youth—now that she was losing hers, and she clung desperately to what was left her of beauty and love.

Parker was busy at the other end of the room, and her back was turned.

"Send your maid away," Nina whispered. "I want to speak to you."

Dolores told the woman that she would not need her any more that night, and Parker flitted away to help Mrs. Eliot.

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THE LOCKET AND LADY DESMOND

OU won't think I rush in where angels fear to tread, will you?" asked Nina, with her loveliest smile. "Tillingbourne made his little wail to me. I like him. You know that, don't you?"

"I know that you're very kind," said Dolores, rather wearily.

Nina laughed. "Modest little thing! Doesn't it appreciate its own attractions? Poor Tillingbourne! What are you going to do with him? You could be the making of that boy, dear."

- "Only if I loved him."
- "But—can't you try to love him? Other girls don't find it difficult."
- "Then let him go to one of those other girls and forget about me."
- "He won't do that, perhaps because they don't find it difficult."
 - "I'm sorry. But I can't help it."
 - "Are you sure?"
 - "Very, very sure."

Dolores's tone disheartened Lady Desmond. This was no girlish caprice, evidently; and the young voice sounded so tired that the experienced woman guessed that Dolores had some trouble which she was hiding. Of course, it might be

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nothing more serious than regret at giving Lord Tilling-bourne pain; but Nina did not believe it was that. If it were, Dolores would not be flippantly recommending him to go and be consoled by other girls.

"There is some one else; I don't care what her mother thinks," Lady Desmond said to herself.

She looked closely at Dolores, who was nervously unfastening a string of pearls from her throat, with an air of wishing to busy herself with something.

"How she wishes I would go!" she thought. "But I won't —yet." A sudden inspiration told her that if she hoped to find out anything it must be by surprising the girl.

"If you're so sure you can never change your mind about Tillingbourne, it must be because there's another man in your heart already," she said abruptly.

At least, she had succeeded in taking Dolores by surprise. Such a suggestion from her tactful hostess came as a blow. Unnerved already by the mental crisis through which she had passed, the girl winced at the unexpected attack, and let the pearls drop on the floor. In stooping to pick them up—an excuse to hide her face before answering—out from among the lace frills of her dressing gown tumbled a locket attached to a gold chain delicate as a hair. Seeing her secret treasure flash into sight, Dolores forgot the pearls. She let them lie where they had fallen, in the white fur of a polar bear, and hastily gathered up the chain; but the clasp which fastened it together had slipped round from the back, and caught in her lace sleeve. For an instant she was helpless; and that instant gave Nina Desmond her chance.

"Let me help you, dear," she said. Then without waiting for Dolores's assent, she stepped quickly forward and

caught up the end of the chain where the locket hung, face inward.

"Oh, don't—please!" cried Dolores. But she was too late. Lady Desmond had—as if inadvertently caused the open-faced locket to swing round and give up its secret.

Her eyes sprang vividly to the painted miniature, for she knew that she was doing a monstrous thing, a thing which the girl would never in her heart forgive, no matter what excuses might be made, and the one hope was to learn the truth at a glance; there would never be an opportunity for another. If the face were De Grey's, then the affair between the two must have made rapid advances while Nina was absent in Scotland, and in the fraction of a second between snatching the chain and twisting it round for a look at the locket, she almost prayed that the face she was about to see might not be St. John's. She had felt that the relief of finding some one else enshrined would be the most exquisite sensation she had known for years; but at sight of the tiny likeness painted so carefully by Dolores, Nina Desmond dropped the chain as if it had burned her fingers.

She uttered no sound, but the quick drawing in of her breath was a gasp.

Dolores, terrified at the revelation of a secret not hers alone, forgot to resent Lady Desmond's prying. Her frightened eyes sought Nina's and asked the question her lips would not speak: "Do you know—do you remember that face?"

The other's pallor answered, and added to the girl's terror. Dolores would have put her right hand in the fire sooner than let its handiwork betray the man whose secret she was pledged to keep. She would have given anything if she had never copied the portrait he had so trustingly made at her request.

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She had been cruelly thoughtless to run this risk, she realized when it was too late, and she had yet to learn how much harm was done. But she had been so cautious in hiding the existence even of the thin gold chain! How could she have dreamed of an accident like this?

For a moment Lady Desmond stood still, as if dazed. Her blood was drumming in her temples. She looked frightened, horrified; and the sallow pallor of her face added to Dolores's fear.

"Who is that man?" Nina asked at last.

"It is cowardly and vulgar to tell lies," were the words that echoed in the girl's ears, as always if she were tempted from the truth. Her father's words; but she could not let them guide her now, for she was called upon to fight for somebody who could not fight for himself—somebody whose cause she had already more than half betrayed.

"No one," she replied firmly.

Presence of mind came slowly back to Nina Desmond. She must know how and where the girl had found this miniature. It was like an insult to her that this young stranger from America should be wearing it, secretly, over her heart. And to have seen it when expecting to see the face of St. John de Grey was horrible to her. It was as if a blood-stained ghost had risen between her and the man she had learned to love so passionately.

"That is no answer," she said, in the tone she used to her maid; and something of her real feeling for Dolores shot from the gray-green eyes.

The girl's pride rose. "Why should I answer you at all, Lady Desmond?"

Nina remembered herself-and prudence. "Forgive me,"

she cried changing abruptly to gentleness. "You don't know, you can't know, my reasons. But I have good ones—the best—for questioning you. I'll explain presently. But if you keep me at arm's length about this, I shall have to go to your mother. It will be my duty. But first, as a favor I ask you again: who is that man whose picture you are wearing?"

"I don't know who he is." Dolores was at bay now. She was determined that Lady Desmond should learn nothing.

"You don't know who he is? Yet you wear his picture inside your dress—you hide it there? Miss Eliot, is this a secret from your mother?"

"There is no secret, because there's nothing to tell," the girl replied doggedly.

"You mean-you know nothing about this man?"

"Nothing—whatever. I admired his picture, that's all. So I'm wearing it."

A little color came back to Nina's face. "Is that true?" she persisted.

Dolores blushed. "I don't tell fibs, Lady Desmond."

"I beg your pardon. You must think me abominable. But when I've told you—or your mother—why I——"

"I'd rather you wouldn't tell my mother anything," said the girl, her cheeks a bright rose color. "There's no secret. I've just said there wasn't, and you must believe me. But you haven't a right to talk about a thing that—that you've found out in such a way. And—and I do think it was abominable of you, Lady Desmond."

"Really, it was all an accident," Nina assured her. "I thought to help you. How could I suppose that a child like you would be hiding a man's picture under her dress? Do forgive me for speaking plainly, for you can hardly guess

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how it strikes me. Perhaps girls are brought up differently in America, but here it seems—rather shocking. If I had any thought in my mind about the chain, it was that it held some little talisman—a medal with your patron saint on it, perhaps. But, good heavens, what a patron saint! Believe me, the best thing you can do is to confide in me about this thing, for otherwise your mother must be told. The very fact that you don't want her to know shows that you feel you've been doing wrong, though how wrong I'm sure you can't possibly dream."

"The reason I don't want mother to be told is because she would think me very silly and romantic to carry about the picture of a man whose very name I don't know."

- "You don't know his name?"
- "No. Not even that."
- "Where did you find his picture?"

Dolores was silent for a few seconds. Then she answered: "At home; at Queen's Quadrangles."

"O-oh! You found it." Lady Desmond's exclamation faded into a sigh, perhaps of relief. "No one said anything about it to you? Not Lady Rosamund, or anyone else?"

"No one at all." And this was true, for not even to the ghost of the lost court had Dolores spoken of the likeness she had painted.

"Nobody has ever spoken to you of this man, then?"

The girl shook her head.

- "Then let me tell you that the best thing you can do is to throw his picture into the fire, and forget that you ever saw it."
 - " No. I won't do that!" Dolores exclaimed.
 - "Give it to me, and let me burn it, if you won't yourself."

"No. I shall keep it. There's no harm in that."

"There is harm," said Nina Desmond in a hard, strained voice, as if speaking with an effort. "It's a terrible thing that a picture of this man should have been left lying about at Queen's Quadrangles, for a young girl like you to find, and build up a romance about. You had better hear the truth now, and then you will throw away that miniature without being told to do it. That man committed a horrible and cowardly crime. I—oh, I find that I can't speak of it, even after all these years. It makes me sick—sick."

Nina Desmond put her hands before her face, as if she shut away from her eyes some dreadful sight. "Will you throw the picture into the fire now?" she asked chokingly.

"No," said Dolores, very pale. "I don't believe that a man with a face like that could have committed a horrible crime."

Lady Desmond looked at her strangely. "He confessed it," she said. "It's hideous to talk of, but—for your sake I'll try to tell you the story of——"

"No," the girl cut her short, "I won't hear it-from you."

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LIFE IS A DREAM

HOUGH Dolores had refused to hear the tale that Lady Desmond would have told her, she thought of nothing else.

"So that is why—" she would begin to say to herself, and then break the thought in two, with violence. It was terrible to her that anyone should be able to speak of his past, hidden from her, as Lady Desmond had spoken, and she longed to defend him; but she could not, for she was supposed to know nothing of his existence. And since he had not wished her to hear any of the neighborhood gossip which she might have picked up, concerning a tragedy of long ago, she would not even think about that tragedy, if she could put it out of her mind.

As a punishment to herself for what she called her carelessness, she would not wear the miniature, but laid it away in her jewel case, and wore instead, on the gold chain, the key which locked the box.

The mother and daughter were not quite so frankly happy together as usual, during the rest of their stay in London, though they left Lady Desmond's the day after the theater party, according to the plan made before coming. There was plenty to do in town, but Frances was anxious about Dolores's state of mind, and did not like to question the girl concerning

her feeling for Lord Tillingbourne or Captain de Grey; while as for Dolores, it was a pain to have secret worries which she could not tell her mother, and somehow all the sadder to feel that she did not wish to tell.

They bought a great many pretty things, including favors for the cotillon which was to be the climax of the fancy dress dance which Frances meant soon to give, and tired themselves out before returning to Queen's Quadrangles—each glad to get back, though for different reasons.

It was evening when they arrived, almost time to dress for dinner, and Dolores's first thought was to go into the bookroom to give the signal that she was there, and would be free that night. But almost immediately came the answer, five knocks, which meant that she must not come.

Of all the mysteries surrounding the lost court, and the ghost of the lost court, this adverse signal seemed one of the most obscure. She had begun to take the mysteries more or less for granted, but she could not understand this. The ghost was always alone; he had nothing to do save to read or paint; he had said that her coming was like sunshine, that it gave him the only happiness he could know; yet occasionally he refused to see her, and never explained why.

She had almost dreaded the first time of meeting him again, after this London visit when her eyes had been fully opened to her own feelings. Yet she had longed for it as well, and had counted every moment until the one when she might run to the bookroom and give the signal.

It had not occurred to her that, after this absence which seemed so long, he could have the heart to make it still longer; but this was his greeting. She wished to call to him through the wall, but dared not. Probably, even if she called loudly,

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he could not hear her words, and to do so would be a great risk.

Deeply disappointed, the girl went slowly away, to play with the new spaniel puppy as the most consoling thing she could do.

Yet perhaps it was as well, after all, that she had been denied her visit, for at bedtime Frances followed her to her room, and, after an elaborate preamble, apparently apropos of nothing, let drop the information given by Nina Desmond concerning St. John.

Frances retold in perfect innocence what had been told to her, for (she argued) if Lady Desmond were right, and Dolores had begun to care a little for Captain de Grey, it would be better to warn her in time, though it was sad that such a warning should be necessary. It did not occur to her that Nina might have been fighting for her own hand, nor would it have occurred to the still less experienced Dolores, if it had not been for her sudden change of feeling toward the woman who had fascinated her.

She did not like Lady Desmond now, and she did not believe that Lady Desmond liked her, in spite of many protestations. Dreamy and poetic as was one side of the girl's nature, she inherited something of her father's shrewdness, a quality which she had seldom been called upon to use in her brief and sheltered life. Now, as her mother spoke the conviction flashed into her mind that Lady Desmond was herself in love with St. John de Grey.

The fact that she should have this thought showed that, unconsciously, she had been learning worldly experience in the past few weeks. She had heard the gossip of the country-side, though paying little attention to it, and it had gone in

at one ear if out at the other, that women did sometimes fall in love with men younger than themselves, and that even great ladies occasionally stooped to mean acts in their own interests.

Dolores recalled, half guiltily, that she had noticed how Lady Desmond always heard everything Captain de Grey said, no matter who else was talking; how she always appeared to see him come into a room or leave it, no matter how much occupied she was, or how many other people were there.

"If she cares about him herself, maybe that's why she would like me to say 'Yes' to Lord Tillingbourne," the girl thought, ashamed of such wicked wisdom. And then, a still more worldly idea sprang into her head. If she wanted to punish Lady Desmond for her rude intrusiveness, and other things, she would perhaps only have to be very, very nice to Captain de Grey.

Of course, she said to herself, she would do nothing of the kind. It would be most unworthy, and altogether mean; yet the fancy would flit back and forth in her mind that maybe she had now some power over Lady Desmond, if she should wish to use it.

Next evening, she went again to give the signal to the prisoner of the lost court, but again came the adverse knocks; and this happened for several evenings in succession, until Dolores's heart was heavy with the mystery and sadness of her banishment.

Meanwhile, the invitations to the ball had gone out; just an "At Home" card of Mrs. Eliot's, with "Dancing" written across one corner, in Frances's sincere, painstaking little hand, and "Fancy Dress" across the other.

Lady Desmond wired that she was coming to Tillingbourne

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Court with a large party of friends, and would bring dozens of men to dance. She could not accept her dear Mrs. Eliot's invitation to stop at Queen's Quadrangles, because—well, frankly, because of Lady Rosamund V.-E. She would not have the courage to put herself overnight beneath the same roof with that lady.

A whole week had gone by, counting the visit to London, since Dolores and the ghost of the lost court had met; but at last, one evening—just when the girl had half made up her mind never to knock again, if she were again denied—came back the raps which meant an invitation.

It seemed so long since they saw each other, and she had felt so much in the interval, that Dolores almost expected to see a change in the man who held her thoughts. But she could find no difference, unless, perhaps, something more of reserve in his manner. She tried to think, though, that this might be in her own imagination, because she herself felt a certain new shyness with him. She was tinglingly conscious that she loved him, and that to love him was the wildest, maddest thing a girl had ever done or could do. Nothing could come of such a love except misery, and the only hope left was that he might never guess.

He did not explain why he had not let her come to him, though he did say, almost stiffly, that losing her companionship had been a cause of deep regret. "I've missed you a great deal," he said at last, as if the words would come in spite of some need to keep them back; and then Dolores, in a panic lest she should show herself too pleased with the admission, began hurriedly to tell such news as she had saved for him. She spoke of the coming dance, as if she delighted in the idea, and talked more of Lord Tillingbourne and Cap-

tain de Grey than she ever had before. This was in her instinctive wish to hide from him that in reality he was the one man in her thoughts. She must let him understand that there were others; that she cared for him only as a friend who would be interested, in a friendly way, in her small doings.

"I'm going to have a pretty dress for the dance," she said.

"The very prettiest I ever had; and do you know, I can remember all my dresses since I've been grown up—every one, in a long procession."

"How young you are!" he exclaimed, his smile rather wistful. "So young that you can remember every dress you ever had! I wish I could see you in the new one—though all your dresses seem wonderful to me."

"I'll come and show myself to you, in the midst of the dancing, if I can run away," said Dolores. "I'm going to be Undine, with a crystal veil and showers of crystal beads over billows of white and green chiffon."

"Oh, but what I should like is to see you at the ball, as other men who aren't ghosts will see you," said the man who was a ghost. "I want to see you as Tillingbourne and De Grey and the others will see you. I should like you to give me three or four dances, as you'll give them."

"How I wish it might be!" sighed Dolores. "Used you to dance when—when—"

"When I was alive? Yes, I was rather fond of it. I was young, like those others, when I was alive. You see, I died young."

"Don't speak like that. I can't bear it!" Dolores cried.

"I won't then. We'll talk of the ball. How many dances are you going to give Lord Tillingbourne?"

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- "Only one," said Dolores.
- "He'll want more."
- "I don't know. I only know he won't get them."
- "But De Grey? How many is he to have?"
- "Oh, he's different! He shall have as many as he likes."
- "That may be saying a good deal."
- "He dances gloriously—as well as he rides and plays tennis," said Dolores, still bent on showing the ghost, who had deliberately kept her at a distance for so long, that she was interested in others. But the tight line of pain that came as he pressed his lips suddenly together brought her a pang of horrified remorse. How cruel she was to talk of dancing, and riding, and tennis, and things that other men could do, while he could do nothing! She hated herself, and tried so hard to think of some way of turning the subject that she found herself tongue-tied.

He did not speak for a moment. His eyes looked dull and tired, but suddenly they brightened, and he smiled at her with a new recklessness and daring that changed his face. "Will you do me a favor on the night of the ball?" he asked.

- "Of course. You know I will," said Dolores.
- "Keep one dance free, to give me in your thoughts. No matter who tries to persuade you to dance it, promise that you won't; promise you'll sit and imagine you are my partner."
- "I should love to do that!" exclaimed the girl. "I wish I'd thought of it myself before you did, because it's a charming idea."
- "I'm rather glad it was I who thought of it first," said the ghost. "It's a promise, then?"
 - "Yes. An engagement. What dance will you have?"

"It must be a waltz. Will you tell the musicians to play an old favorite of mine—when I was in the world? Perhaps, then, I can hear some faint echo of it even here in prison."

His tone was not sad now, but excited and almost gay, yet for that reason it was the more pathetic to Dolores. It hurt her to think that his only pleasure could be in hearing a far-away strain of the music to which happier people danced.

"What shall it be?" she asked, dropping her long eyelashes to hide a suspicious glitter, like rising tears.

"An old-fashioned thing. But what would you have! I'm a thing of the past, and this air reminds me of some pleasant hours. 'Life is a Dream.' Will you remember?"

"It's easy to remember," said Dolores, "for life often seems to me like that—at least, part of it does. I—" she stopped quickly. She might have said things safer left unsaid. "It shall be the last dance but one, before supper and the cotillon. You mustn't forget to be thinking of me—a little before twelve."

"I won't forget to be thinking of you then," he said, with rather an odd emphasis, which made Dolores glance up suddenly; but he was not looking at her. "My thoughts will run about seeking for you, and they'll find you, wherever you are."

"That will be a week from to-night," the girl reflected aloud.

She would not ask him if they were to meet again meanwhile, but she hoped that he would tell her; for she could not come and knock only to be sent away, night after night, as had happened before. Her eyes put the question her lips would not speak, however, and he answered it.

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"Come and talk to me just once more before that night," he said. "Let it be the evening before the dance, if you can. Until then—it's best for me to be alone. Oh, not that I won't want you! You couldn't think that, could you, my—kind little friend? I want you—always. But—well, I can't give you any reasons for keeping you away. Only this: that it's for the best."

Still, she could not help feeling hurt that he should bid her to stop away for a whole week. Surely, he could have her with him if he wanted her very much. What if it should be that he had guessed how much she cared, and was trying to break with her now, gently? He had seemed cold, or at least reserved, and then, just at the last, had been himself again. Yet the end was that he had told her it was "best for him to be alone."

She did not dispute the decision, of course, but she went away very miserable, and could think of no better way of consoling herself during the week than by flirting a little with Captain de Grey.

He was so pleasant and so kind. To flirt with him hardly seemed like flirting. It amused her, and kept her mind from dwelling on things so sad that the mere thinking of them seemed to crush out her youth; and then it made him happy. The girl was not quite sure that he was seriously in love with her; for he was not intense and rather terrifying like Lord Tillingbourne, but always seemed ready to laugh and see the funny side of things, so that she could feel she was not hurting him very much, whatever happened.

Then Lady Desmond arrived at Tillingbourne Court, and Lord Tillingbourne came the same day, for he found little trouble in getting leave when he wanted it. Dolores was cool

to him, for he had alarmed her a little on the night of his theater party, and she did not wish to give him another chance to speak again about his feelings. She wanted him to realize that if he had any hope left he must give it up. Accordingly, she was more than ever friendly in her manner to St. John when Lord Tillingbourne was there to see.

There had been many cold, wet days during that summer, but September had been mild, and October was proving warmer than it had been in June. The night of the fancy dress dance at Queen's Quadrangles was perfect, and the double glass doors which led from the ballroom into the cypress court stood wide open, to show the court beautifully illuminated. The fountain court, too, was lit by many Chinese lanterns, and fairy lamps half hidden among palms and flowers; while under the falling spray of the fountain itself rose-colored lights were arranged in such a way as to transform the falling drops to rubies.

There could scarcely be a house better planned for entertaining than was Queen's Quadrangles; and Lady Rosamund, though she had appeared startled on first hearing of the ball, had eventually done her best to make the place beautiful for the occasion. She had herself decorated the great hall and the two drawing-rooms, with flowers. The colored lights in the cypress and fountain courts were her idea; and hers was the scheme of decoration for the supper tables.

She had been looking even more white and frail than usual, for the past few weeks, but she only smiled when Dolores suggested that she was doing too much.

"I want your ball to be a success," she said to the girl; and I should like to feel that some very small part of the

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success was owing to me. I have been able to do so little for you."

She did not say that she knew she had hindered, rather than helped, her tenants so far; but Dolores felt that some such thought was in her mind, and was drawn toward her with a mysterious sympathy.

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A FIGURE IN ARMOR

AFTER all, the girl had not been able to visit the lost court the night before the ball, because of a small impromptu dance at Sir George Gaines', to which Frances had wished to take her; but Dolores was not wholly sorry for this. She had wished to see the prisoner, and had longed for the night to come that she might go to him; yet when she found herself prevented, she had said that perhaps it was as well. She must not make herself too cheap. And she had tapped out her adverse signal with a kind of miserable satisfaction.

When she saw Undine's shimmering reflection in the mirror, however, tears started to her eyes as she remembered what the ghost had said. He had wanted to see her in that dress. If only she could fly to him, if but for a moment! Yet she had volunteered to show herself to him, and he had not accepted the offered visit. Now, it was too late in any case, for the hour of signaling was long past, and she had not gone to the bookroom. Even if she wished to go, in spite of all, without the signal, the door under the terrace would be but a block of marble.

It was not a very large dance, for the Eliots' circle of acquaintance was limited; but by this time almost everyone of importance within many miles had followed the Duke of Bridgewater's example and called at Queen's Quadrangles.

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They had all been invited to the ball, and had accepted. Some had asked to bring friends who were staying with them; and Lady Desmond had brought a big party. Besides, there were a few American friends staying in London who had come down to Queen's Quadrangles for the night.

There were more than a hundred people dancing in the great white ballroom by the time eleven o'clock had struck, and as they were all in fancy dress, with brilliant costumes of different ages and countries, the scene on which the old Vane-Eliot portraits looked down was like a moving picture.

Dolores was too young not to be excited by the dancing and the music; and her heart was beating fast and her eyes shining as the time drew near for the waltz she had saved for the ghost. She was like a girl who waits the coming of her lover.

She had refused to dance it with Lord Tillingbourne and De Grey and several others, whom she forgot even as she sent them away with the answer that she was. "engaged for that waltz." And for the gallop which came before, she had chosen her partner with an eye to getting rid of him easily afterwards.

He was a young and pink youth, who had been so much chaffed by his friends because of the character he had unluckily chosen to represent—that of Henry VIII—that he was reduced almost to tears by the time the evening was half over; and his one desire was to escape to the supper room where he might drown his sorrows in lobster salad and champagne.

While Dolores dutifully danced with her pink partner, her thoughts flew ahead to the next dance.

"Where would he like me to sit and think of him, while his favorite waltz is played?" she was wondering; and it seemed

to her that when the time came she would feel him calling her.

Suddenly the answer seemed to come, as if his voice had spoken it. "The bookroom!"

Why, of course, she must go to the bookroom. She ought to have thought of that at first, never doubting that it was the one place for her thought-dance with an invisible partner. She would be nearer to him there than anywhere else, separated only by double wainscoting and the small space between. Besides, the library through which she must pass, before she could reach and shut herself up in the bookroom, was not supposed to be open to guests. Splendid as was the vast, darkly wainscoted room with its deep-set windows, it was gloomy at night, even with its full array of a hundred wax candles in silver candelabra. In consultation, Lady Rosamund and Frances had agreed that, even for flirtatious couples, more alluring places could be arranged in the great hall, and the fountain and cypress court; therefore, though the library door was not locked against invaders, nothing had been done to make the room especially attractive. Nobody would be there, Dolores thought, and she could hide in the bookroom as long as she liked without danger of being tracked down by any importunate partner.

"I'm quite giddy," said Undine to Henry VIII, when their gallop was half over. "Let's stop and rest. And oh, would you mind going to look for my lilies? I had a lovely bunch, and I've lost them somewhere."

The pink youth led her out from the ballroom into the great hall. There she chose a seat close to an open glass door, leading into the cypress court, which would be for her a way of escape. Each side of this door was usually guarded by a tall

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figure in armor, visor down, lance and shield in hand, and one Dolores had named "Sir Launcelot." Close to him stood an old settle of carved oak, which might once have graced some monastery, and there the girl often chose to sit, propped up with cushions, to read the "Idylls of the King," or Malory's "Morte d'Arthur," an occupation she considered appropriate to that particular spot.

Now, she had seated herself on this old settle, awaiting a convenient moment to slip away when no man she knew was looking.

St. John de Grey, dressed as a Troubadour, passed with Lady Desmond, very wonderful as Cleopatra, a diamond asp twisted round her throat. St. John threw rather a wistful glance toward the slender, crystal-sparkling figure of Undine on the carved seat, but went on toward the fountain court, according to his partner's wish.

Then Lord Tillingbourne sauntered by, a cavalier of Charles II's day, his costume a family heirloom. He was partnerless, and looked sulky, though handsome, and Dolores was in a fright lest he should see and follow her. He passed, with his back half turned to her, glancing round as if searching for some one, and Dolores feared that she knew too well who that "some one" was. Lest he should turn fully, she jumped up, with the idea of stepping behind King Arthur, whose big shield would screen her for an instant, until she could whisk through the open door.

To her surprise, however, the figure was gone; and on the low, velvet-colored platform where it had always stood resting its shield and lance, was a suit of ancient Japanese armor, whose place had been in the entrance hall.

So surprised was Dolores at the absence of King Arthur

that for an instant she forgot the danger of being discovered by Lord Tillingbourne.

"I wonder who took him away, and when—and why?" she asked herself. "I suppose mother and Lady Rosamund must have thought the contrast between the old English armor and the Japanese would be interesting, but I don't suppose any of these people notice or care; and I shall beg them to put King Arthur back to-morrow. I like him to be here."

Then, as Lord Tillingbourne spoke for a minute with Gladys Gaines, who was trying hard to live up to the character of "Queen of Hearts," Dolores slipped out into the cypress court; thus, to a corridor off from the long gallery, and on to the library.

The door was ajar as if somebody had lately come in or passed out; but peering into the dimness, Dolores saw no one.

No more than a dozen tall wax candles had been lit, and their light was almost lost in the huge room, swallowed up by the shadows which seemed to steal out from the dark oak wainscoting every night as soon as twilight fell.

The candle flames, like tiny points of silver alloyed with gold, were dotted here and there against the black walls, but the room mostly owed such illumination as it had to the great mullioned window of painted glass set in the center of the south wall, between rows of bookshelves.

It was very old glass, with the family crest and motto emblazoned upon it in deep, rich colors. Now, the moonlight which could not penetrate the deep-set windows in the east streamed through these jeweled panes, throwing reflections like scattered flower petals—rose, azure, purple and gold—on the bare, polished floor.

The room looked an ideal place for a ghost to walk; and as

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Dolores opened the door it seemed to her that something moved among the shadows by the stone-pillared fireplace.

"Is anyone there?" she called timidly, for the mystery of the vast moonlit room thrilled her fancy with strange thoughts.

No one answered; and as she advanced a step or two, staring through the dusk, she told herself that the movement had been nothing more than some wavering shadow caused by a candle that flickered with the draught. The fireplace (with its stone wolves rampant) was guarded, as was the tall entrance to the cypress court, by figures in armor, one on either side. Dolores could see them, as she looked past the chimney-piece to the door of the bookroom; and it seemed to her that to-night there were three figures instead of two; but one—the farthest one—might be only a shadow of the mailed form in front.

The girl had begun to cross the room, when she remembered that, safe as the library seemed to be from intruders, it might be wiser to shut the door which she had left ajar. She ran back, and had just grasped the handle when it was turned from the other side, pushed forcibly in spite of her faint resistance, and Lord Tillingbourne came in.

It was so dark that she could not have recognized his features, but his flowing golden wig under the plumed, cavalier hat, his red velvet coat, his tall, broad-shouldered figure, and his slightly swaggering walk, were unmistakable.

"I've followed you," he said. "You didn't think I saw you in the hall, but I did, as you slipped out. You refused me this waltz, because you said you were engaged, but you've come here alone. For whom are you waiting here in the dark? By Jove, it's more than I can stand to think of any other man

meeting you here! He shan't have the game all to him-self."

As he spoke, he shut the door, and stood with his back against it.

"No one is coming to meet me here," said Dolores, angry and distressed at the interruption. Through the closed door she caught faintly the distant strains of "Life is a Dream." Her thought-waltz with the ghost was beginning. She would not be cheated of it by Lord Tillingbourne, whom she suddenly felt that she almost hated.

"I came to be alone," she went on sharply. "Please go!"

"No," said Lord Tillingbourne, "I won't! I may never get such another chance with you as this if I don't take it now, for you've been treating me as you wouldn't treat those beastly little spaniels of yours, and I don't propose to stand it. You've got to tell me what's wrong, and what's made you dislike me."

"I don't dislike you," answered Dolores impatiently, eager to be rid of him at any price. "But I shall, if you don't go now—this very minute—and leave me alone."

"Alone!" echoed Tillingbourne incredulously. "You wouldn't be long alone if I left you. What do you think I'm made of—flesh and blood, or stone? I tell you I love you. You're driving me off my head. You've got to love me. You've got to be my wife. This time I won't leave you till you've promised."

"Oh-you'll make me despise you!" she cried.

"I believe you're playing with me," he exclaimed furiously. "Unless you're in love with some other man, you'd love me. You don't know what love is—that's the trouble! You're a child—a baby-child. I'm going to teach you how to love."

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"No—no!" she protested. And as he would have snatched her in his arms she ran from him, hoping to reach the door of the bookroom and slam it in his face if he tried to follow. There was a bolt on the other side, and she could lock herself in. The music of "Life is a Dream" had only just begun. There was time to keep her promise still, in spite of Lord Tillingbourne—in spite of everything.

So she ran swiftly and lightly, but a Persian rug slid under her foot on the polished floor, just as she neared the great fireplace, and she would have slipped if Tillingbourne had not caught her, holding her tight against his breast.

"Let me go!" she exclaimed sharply, but he held her the closer for her struggling.

"Now—now!" he stammered, his blood in his head and his heart pounding, as he pressed the slim, resisting figure to him. "Now I shall kiss you till you faint, or tell me I've taught you how to love me. This is the only way with a cold child like you."

She cried out in shame and fear of him, as his head bent over hers, but before his lips could touch her face a strange thing had happened. Steel glimmering darkly blue in the moonlight, one of the tall armored figures by the fireplace stepped out of its place, and a mailed hand fastened on Tillingbourne's shoulder a grip literally of iron.

"Coward! Let her go!" a voice spoke, issuing through the closed visor.

So fierce was the grasp that it bruised the muscles under the velvet coat. With an oath, Tillingbourne threw back his head, and started at sight of the figure in armor.

"By the lord, I'll make you pay for this—whoever you are!" he threatened.

As he mechanically released her, Dolores sprang away from him, her chiffons crumpled, crystal beads tinkling. Then, her high heels tangled among trailing lace and fringes, she swayed in danger of falling until she had caught at the back of a tall chair. Thus supported she stood, amazed and fascinated, watching the velvet cavalier and the figure in armor.

The man in steel was her Sir Launcelot, who had been moved here from the hall, and who had come to life in the magic of the moon, just as she had often dreamed, between sleep and waking, that he and his enchanted companions might do.

"Very well, make me pay," he spoke to Tillingbourne again from behind the visor.

His voice sounded hollow, curiously unreal behind that barrier of steel, but Dolores's heart leaped, and she bit her lip, pressing both hands over her mouth to keep from crying out in her surprise and joy.

"King Arthur's" armor clad her ghost of the lost court. For her sake he had come out of his hidden house. For her sake he was here, and it was he who had saved her the shame of Lord Tillingbourne's enforced kisses.

At first, her emotion was all joy. Then it changed suddenly to fear. For if coming into the world did not mean for him the deadliest peril, surely he would not be wasting his best years as a prisoner in the lost court. All the blood in her body seemed to rush back upon her heart, in dread of discovery for him; but for his sake she dared not speak or move.

"Make me pay," the voice said defiantly; and the man in armor stood motionless with folded arms, as if waiting for what Lord Tillingbourne might choose to do.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

There was something very strange and ghostlike about the figure, clothed in steel, as the moonlight that streamed through the great stained-glass window fell upon it.

Lord Tillingbourne was tall, but the armored form loomed taller, and chains and scales of steel glinted cold and spectral.

Tillingbourne's blood was cooling now. He saw that the figure had stepped down from a low block, covered with dark velvet, and that its mate still rested in the attitude it had retained for years on the other side of the wide fireplace.

When the young man had been a boy of twelve, he had come with his father to Queen's Quadrangles, and with one now dead and dishonored had entered this room. He remembered well that on each side of the fireplace had stood an armored figure; and when after a lapse of many years, Lady Desmond had made him acquainted with the house again, only a few weeks ago, he had noticed that the armor was still in its old place.

A curious, superstitious thrill went through him, as he faced the man clad in steel that glittered eerily in the moon-light. There was something terrible to him in the immobility of the figure with its folded arms; and the hollow tones of the voice behind the visor gave him a shiver of awe.

Tillingbourne's blood was hot, and he was of sullen temper, quick to take offense, slow to forget; nor was he a coward in ordinary circumstances. When no more than a boy he had gone straight from Sandhurst to South Africa, and had fought well. But as a small child he had had a Scotch nurse, a grim and fearsome woman who put him to bed at night and dared him to cry, with threats of ghosts, of men with severed throats, and headless hounds. Never had he been able to live down the influence that grim woman had exerted upon his

childhood. Throughout his life he had been superstitious, and had hated talk of ghosts.

Queen's Quadrangles was of all houses a haunt for ghosts. There was the story of the lost court, with its many mysteries; the beautiful lady who had lived there for love, and died for jealousy; of her murder; of her screams to be heard still at midnight at certain times of the year. There was a tale that the place had a new ghost among the old ones, since the tragedy which had turned it to a house of mourning; and as he heard that strangely echoing challenge, "Make me pay," many legends of horror rushed to Tillingbourne's mind, while for an instant a red pageant passed before his eyes.

But he recovered his courage after a second or two, telling himself angrily that he was a fool, and that Dolores would despise him for a coward.

Everyone was in fantastic costume to-night. This man, whoever he was, had played a trick upon him—dressing up in the suit of armor and standing upon the velvet platform sacred to the old family heirloom. Perhaps—and this thought sent a wave of flame through Tillingbourne's cooling blood—the man had been waiting for Dolores, and it was to meet him that she had come stealing into the great library.

"I'm d—d if I don't make you pay!" he retorted furiously, and sprang forward to the spot whence the mailed hand had flung him back; "whoever you may be!"

"Whoever I may be," the figure in armor echoed, and raised the visor.

The moonlight, shining through the pale blue cloak of a knight painted on glass, touched the face suddenly revealed, making it like the face of the dead.

That same face, alive and young, Tillingbourne had seen

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

in this room as a boy. Now, its flesh had moldered to dust in the grave, long, long years ago. He knew that. There could be no question of it. He had a friend who said that he had seen the face in its coffin. Yet—through eyes dark as the fate which had destroyed a soul, that same face was looking at him from the suit of armor.

"Dolores!" he stammered. But Dolores was gone; and hesitating no longer Lord Tillingbourne rushed out of the haunted room he hardly knew how.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE INVISIBLE PARTNER

HEN she guessed who had come to the rescue, Dolores fled to the bookroom and waited there, trembling in the doorway, where she could see what went on without being seen.

The back of the figure in armor was turned toward her, but she knew when the visor was lifted, and seeing the effect of the revelation upon Lord Tillingbourne she let herself sink down on one of the cushioned seats which ran part way around the wall.

She knew that her invisible partner would come to her there, and he did come, immediately after the loud, hurried slam of the door which told her that Lord Tillingbourne had gone.

Two candles only, in silver candlesticks on an old Jacobean chest of drawers, redeemed the little bookroom from darkness, and each seemed to give no more than a thimbleful of light. But it was enough for a glimmering white Undine and a dark man in armor to look into each other's eyes.

She held out her little hands, and then laughed up at him when he took them both in the cold clasp of the mailed gloves which she had given him no time to throw aside.

"Oh, how can I laugh!" she faltered, shrinking into frightened gravity. "I'm sure you are in great danger. You did this for me, and I thank you—thank you again and again. But I know you're running some dreadful risk that I don't understand."

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- "No," and he smiled at her, his face very handsome and clearcut in its frame of steel. "My ghosthood saves me from danger. If you ever doubted before, you know now that I am a ghost."
- "The ghost of Launcelot, then," the girl said gently. "I call this suit of armor Launcelot's."
- "So you told me once—one night when I asked you to describe the house as you saw it."
 - "And you remembered?"
- "Yes, I remember most things you say to me. It was that put the idea of what I'm doing now into my head."
 - "I wonder if I'm sorry or glad!" the girl reflected aloud.
- "I should like you to say you're glad, because I've looked forward to this ever since I saw you last, as a great night—a brave night."
 - "Then I am glad-Launcelot," said Dolores.
- "It's good to be called that; to feel that you think—kindly of me, or you wouldn't choose such a noble name."
- "I used to think you looked like Sir Launcelot of the Lake when I first saw you in the moonlight on the water," the girl volunteered. "So I named the armor after—that idea of you, and began reading the Idylls all over again."
- "You are almost the only one who ever thinks of me except with horror—if any think of me at all in these days," said the ghost in armor.

Dolores shivered a little, remembering the horrible things that Lady Desmond had said—things which she had tried to put out of her mind from that moment as unthinkable, as well as unbelievable. But she did not speak. She only looked at him, with how much of her heart in her eyes she did not know.

"Didn't you guess that I would come to you for this dance?" he asked.

Dolores shook her head. "I never dreamed of it—except that you'd come in thought. I was sure you would do that, and I was on my way here, because it seemed the best place, when—when—you know what happened."

- "Brute! I forgot myself for a moment, came near knocking him down. If I had, with the mailed fist, I might have killed him, and then—"
- "Oh, how thankful I am that you didn't! It would have killed me, too—or it would have been worse, if I couldn't have died."
- "I was afraid of myself first for a second or two. Then—the past came up—" His lips tightened, and he turned away from her, but her first words called him back.
- "This is our waltz, you know," she said quickly, to change the current of his thought. "Can you hear the music?"

"Yes, faintly. Will you dance with me?"

Surprised, but delighted, she sprang up, and he laid his steel-clad arm round her waist. She remembered that he had never voluntarily touched her before. Her thoughts swam in a sea of dreams, as the far-away music floated to her ears, and she dared not look up at him, though she felt that his eyes were on her. Then suddenly the music ceased. The waltz was ended.

- "I couldn't have danced after all, I'm afraid, in this steel box," he said, his voice sounding strained and different. She dared to glance up, and saw that his face was flushed; but as she looked the blood ebbed away and left it pale.
 - "Oughtn't you to go now?" she asked.
 - "Not quite yet," he answered. "Most ghosts have one

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

night of freedom a year. This is the only one I've known for many. Don't grudge me a few minutes. But I forgot. What a selfish wretch I am! You're engaged for this next dance, of course, and——"

"You must know that the next dance and all the other dances are nothing to me!" Dolores exclaimed, almost angrily. "It's of you I'm thinking—your danger, if——"

"Please forget that," he broke in. "Don't you want to know how I managed this?"

"Yes," she said, falling into his mood.

"You'd told me it was to be a fancy dress ball, or I couldn't have done it," he went on. "I won't tell you how I got the armor. I'll leave that to your imagination. Perhaps I hypnotized one of your servants to remove it from its old platform in the hall, while everybody was at dinner this evening, and to substitute something else for it. Ghosts have an hypnotic influence over human minds sometimes, I've heard. Anyhow I did get it; and put it on, in my own place. Then everything was simple enough. I merely walked out from under the terrace and stalked across the lawns, where if anyone had seen me they would have thought I was a guest coming on foot to the ball-or else an apparition: it didn't matter which. For a long time I stood outside one of the windows of the ballroom, on the south terrace, watching. I saw you dance with your friend Captain de Grey three times, and Lord Tillingbourne once---"

"How did you recognize them?" the girl asked breathlessly, before she had stopped to think, and to remember that she had forbidden herself all questions, however innocent they might seem.

His face changed slightly, but before he could answer, if

he had wished to answer, she cried: "Oh, I didn't mean to ask you that. I don't want you to tell me."

"How loyal and kind you are," he said. "I should think there never has been and never will be again a girl like—my little friend."

Dolores blushed with pleasure at his praise, though a chill was in his last words, gentle though they were.

"What did you do next?" she questioned.

"When it grew later, and I thought that the time for our dance would soon come, I walked round the house and marched in at the front door. Two footmen were there, talking together, but they let me pass, hardly noticing me, thinking, of course, that I was a guest; and I went by in a quiet, businesslike way that gave them confidence. Afterwards I stood by the main entrance to the great hall for a while; and if anyone saw me, they probably took me for an empty suit of armor among the others there. I waited till you came out of the ballroom with a pink young man, who looked like a chromolithograph of Henry VIII. I watched you for a few minutes, seeing your look of surprise when you first discovered that the suit of English armor by the door had been replaced by a Japanese understudy. Then, while you were hiding from Lord Tillingbourne, I came round by way of the long gallery and the corridor into the library, and I hadn't more than stowed a suit of armor in the fireplace, and stepped on its platform, when you appeared. I didn't mean to frighten you; but it occurred to me that you might be followed. And my idea was that when you were in the bookroom I would walk in and surprise you."

"You thought I would come here for—our dance?" the girl asked.

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- "I was almost sure you would."
- "Did you will me to come?"

He smiled. "I tried to."

- "I think I felt it. Oh, I'm so happy to-night."
- "So am I," said the ghost, though his eyes were sad. "Much happier than I have been since—I went out of the world. Far happier than I shall be again—till I leave even my small dark corner of it forever."
- "Why mayn't there come other happy nights like this?" Dolores almost whispered.
- "Because this is too happy. Do you understand? No! I don't want you to understand. You mustn't understand!"
 - "Indeed, I don't," she said wistfully.
- "I'm glad— Well, I shall have this—and other things to remember. And now, little friend—dear, loyal, little friend who has turned my death-in-life into life-in-death—good-by. The ghost must be flitting."
- "Oh, stay a few minutes longer," she pleaded. "Everybody's at supper now, and I don't want supper. I couldn't eat. Stay a little while."
 - "Don't tempt me," he said.
- "Just till time for the cotillon to begin. I'll go then, because it would be rude for me to stop away."
 - "I can't," he answered. "I dare not stop."
- "But why? You can open the big window and go out onto the south terrace. Then you'll be quite near the lake, and there'll be no danger. That's all past now—the risk you took is over."
- "There is another danger," he said. "I want you to bid me good-by, you Undine-with-a-soul. Good-by now, this moment."

"I will then, if I must," she sighed. "And—" she fought with her pride; but it was not a hard fight, because he had shown that he cared enough to come to her. "And I'll tap on the wall here to-morrow at the usual time."

"No," he said. "When I bid you good-by to-night, it must be good-by—for always. I felt that when I came. I'm sure of it now. You mustn't come to me again."

Dolores shrank back as if he had struck her. "Never again! You don't want to see me—ever again?"

He turned away with something that sounded like a groan. "God!" she heard him mutter. "How can I go through with it?"

The voice, sharpened by pain, frightened her. "Oh, what is it—what is the matter?" she implored, her hand on his arm.

"Nothing," he answered. "Only—I'm not as strong as I thought I was, and—this has got to be the end. I meant it to be the end, and it shall. Good-by, precious ray of sunshine, good-by—and I thank you for everything, with all my heart, with all my soul."

He took her hand that lay on his arm and kissed it once, twice, on wrist and palm. Then, putting it away from him, without another word and without looking back he left her standing there half dazed. She saw his tall figure move through the path of moonlight strewn with flowers of color. She saw him open the window and spring out. Then everything seemed over, and throwing herself down on the cushioned seat, she cried bitterly in the crumpled folds of Undine's crystal-beaded veil.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

A CONFESSION

ORD TILLINGBOURNE had the supper dance with Nina Desmond, but he did not seek her out until it was time for their waltz to begin.

"I thought you'd forgotten me," she said crossly; for De Grey had been disappointing, and at the moment there was no one but Tillingbourne, whom she had known since boyhood, upon whom she could conveniently vent her ill humor.

"I've been looking for you," he answered, speaking rather thickly.

She looked sharply up at him. "Tillingbourne, you've been drinking more than is good for you," she said in a low, angry voice. "A charming way to recommend yourself to a prim little puritan of an American girl!"

"I can't help it," he grumbled in return. "Something's happened which would have driven a saint to drink."

"We'll sit this dance out," Nina said shortly. "What's up? Has she refused you again?"

"More or less; but it isn't that which upset me this time," he answered, his turquoise blue eyes less boldly bright than usual. "I've made a d—d ass of myself, that's all. But if it were to come over again, I'm hanged if I don't believe I'd do the same thing."

"Sit down and tell me exactly what has happened," Lady Desmond commanded.

He obeyed, but sat silent for a minute or two, staring in front of him. They had come to sit in the fountain court, and his eyes gloomily followed the rising and falling spray, red as tossed rubies in the rose-colored light.

- "I've seen a ghost," he said at last.
- "Nonsense!" exclaimed Nina. "But you're joking."
- "Do I look much like joking?" he asked.
- "No, you don't. Do you mean you've met some one disagreeably connected with any episode of your past? Some one whom Dolores Eliot wouldn't——"
- "Dolores Eliot saw him, too. It was the ghost of—a murderer. You know who."

Tillingbourne, completely preoccupied with his own emotions, had little concern to spare for hers, but the start she gave and her dead silence afterwards did attract his attention. He turned his eyes slowly to her, and saw how she was sitting with her hand pressed to her throat. Then he remembered things which might make such an announcement thrown at her in such a way particularly painful to Nina Desmond.

"You would have me tell you," he said sulkily.

She got her voice again. "Some one was fooling you," she faltered. "I don't believe in ghosts."

- "Neither do I, when I'm where there are plenty of lights and plenty of people," said Tillingbourne. "That is, I didn't believe them yesterday; but I did a few minutes ago in that gloomy old library, where it was dark except for a candle or two, and a ghastly flood of moonlight."
- "Oh—it was in the library that you thought you saw something!"
- "Did see something. A knight in armor, who spoke to me from behind his visor in a hollow-sounding voice, and then

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showed me his face, blue white in the moonlight, with eyes like the last coals in a dying fire. He looked as if he'd just been executed."

"Ah, God! Don't talk to me of that! You're too horrible," Lady Desmond stammered.

"I forgot. I beg your pardon," said Tillingbourne, suddenly somewhat sobered by the sick horror in her voice. "But it was his face—just as I saw it for the last time in that same room, years ago when I was a kid, except that now it was—a ghost's face. When it looked at me, I seemed turning to jelly. I was every sort of an ass that you can think me. I looked round for Dolores, and when I found that she'd run away, I—well, I didn't exactly stand on the order of my going."

"Oh!" said Lady Desmond. "So Dolores was there. You didn't tell me that."

"Didn't I? I forgot. She went into the library, and as she'd refused to dance the next dance with me, because she was engaged for it, I wanted to know whom she was going to meet there in the moonlight."

Nina Desmond's face was very pale, with not the faintest tint of color under the delicate white film of cosmetic which gave her complexion its pearly transparency. But the look of blank horror in her gray-green eyes was changing slowly into vivid feverish curiosity.

"Do you think Dolores was going into the library to meet some one?" she asked.

"I'm sure she was. But I—and the ghost—frightened her away. She vanished as if she were a ghost herself."

"Tell me the whole thing, precisely as it was, from beginning to end," said Nina.

Tillingbourne told, softening the narrative where it con-

cerned his own actions, and neglecting to mention that the ghostly grip on his shoulder had been strong enough to leave bruises.

"The ghost made you let Dolores go when you were just in the act of kissing her?" echoed Nina.

"I would have been in the act in another second. Of course he couldn't have made me let her go—I'm not quite weak-ling or coward enough for that; but seeing him raise his visor and show that face—just as I was thinking him one of the guests—was a bit overpowering for a minute. I can't describe the effect it had on me. And—as Dolores vanished instantly, there was no particular object in staying. By Jove, I was as cold as if I'd been dipped in ice water, and I was glad enough of a whisky neat, I can tell you."

"Several whiskies neat, I should think," retorted Nina; but her eyes looked as if she saw something far away. As a matter of fact, she was seeing, almost as plainly as if it were before her, the face of the miniature which Dolores Eliot had worn hidden inside her dress.

"The sickening part was, the library used to be his favorite room," went on Tillingbourne. "I remembered hearing that, just as those awful eyes of his were burning through my forehead into my brain. It wasn't one of the pleasantest reflections I ever had."

"Come. Take me in to supper," said Nina, springing up. "We shall both feel better afterwards."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE END OF THE CORRIDOR

OLORES had promised to go to supper with St. John de Grey, and he looked for her vainly in every imaginable place; but at last she appeared just in time for the cotillon, her filmy veil like a light mist across her face.

She had been tired of dancing, she said, and the lights had made her head ache, so she had gone away to rest. But she was better now, and ready for the cotillon. No, she would have nothing to eat; but Captain de Grey might bring her a cup of hot bouillon if he liked. He did like, and waited upon her so faithfully that she was grateful. If she had wished, he would have excused her from dancing the cotillon for which he was to be her partner, but she would not hear of giving it up. "Mother would be worried," she said simply. "Besides, I'm quite all right again now—as right as I shall ever be."

For St. John there was no hidden meaning in that last sentence, for she spoke it smiling.

Once in a fantastic figure of the dance, when all the women were grouped together, Lady Desmond, who by her hostess's request led the cotillon with Lord Tillingbourne, whispered to Dolores: "I want to see you as soon as it's all over. There's something I must say."

After the cotillon, which was to finish the ball, somebody asked for an extra waltz. Neither Dolores nor Lady Desmond

danced it, and several men who had wished to be their partners noticed that they disappeared together. They went out through a long, modernized window in the larger drawing-room, and walked on the west terrace, their blood beating so fast that neither would have known it was cold had the temperature been as autumnal as the month.

"Dolores, I'm almost old enough to be your mother," began Nina. (She was quite old enough, as it happened; but that was a detail.) "You persuaded me to say nothing to Mrs. Eliot about the miniature you were wearing, because you said it was one you had found here in the house—that you knew nothing of the original. But now I begin to think I made a mistake in giving you any promise. Who is this man you are meeting secretly?"

Overwhelmed, the girl could not have answered if she would, and Nina Desmond took advantage of her stricken silence. "I've reason to believe that something underhand, indeed something terrible, is going on in this house, unknown to your mother and to everyone, except yourself and—one other," she continued. "Dolores—Dolores—you're laying up misery and despair for yourself! You must—you shall tell me what is happening—who the man is."

- "I'll tell you nothing, Lady Desmond," the girl faltered. "Because—there is nothing to tell."
- "Then there's something that will have to be found out," cried Nina. "Believe me, I speak as your friend. If there's a mystery here, you must not be mixed up in it. Once again I ask: Who is the man?"
- "Please let me go back to the house," said Dolores. "I was very hot after dancing. Now I am cold."
 - "First listen to me," Lady Desmond commanded. "I shall 250

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come here again at twelve o'clock to-morrow, and I shall look for you in the summerhouse on the south terrace. If you don't meet me there and tell me what dreadful influence is at work upon you in this house, I will ask for your mother, and tell her a thing that I begin to more than suspect. Others may have to know too. This is for your good. And now you understand exactly what is in my mind."

"I don't understand!" the girl flung at her desperately.

"What about the ghost in armor, in the library?" Lady Desmond asked, in a slow, meaning tone. And then, giving the girl no time to answer, turned on her heel to walk briskly away.

Fifteen minutes later she and every other guest—except the half dozen Americans who were staying in the house—had taken leave of Frances Eliot and Dolores.

A great fear had fallen upon the girl, not for herself, but for another. She believed that Nina Desmond had found out a great deal more than she really guessed at. Knowing nothing of Lady Desmond's past in connection with the ghost of the lost court, Dolores was nevertheless sure that they had been connected in some tragic way which made the woman still dangerous to the man.

To-morrow, some terrible thing might happen.

Lady Desmond had said with deadly intention: "Perhaps others may have to know too." And it seemed to the girl that there was a wicked menace in those words.

The story that there was a "lost court" at Queen's Quadrangles was common property. She and Frances had heard the rumor of it before taking the place. And though the saying was that the court had been partially destroyed in a storm and completely swept away in alterations made long

ago, still, if Lady Desmond told what she seemed to guess, suspicion might be aroused that the strange hiding place still existed and was in use.

Whether Nina knew of the hiding place or not, Dolores could not be sure, but certainly some one in the house must be aware of it, or the prisoner of the lost court could not be so well cared for and tended. Old Soames might know, the girl told herself, and conceal his knowledge even from his mistress. He had a queer old face, like a mask, now that she called up features and expression. He would be capable of hiding behind that mask a great secret, and of keeping it for years. Dolores could not imagine that by the flicker of an eyelid he would ever betray knowledge of anything which he wished not to betray.

Suppose there were matters of interest to the police in the secret of this old house? If Lady Desmond had really hit upon the truth, and should speak out what she had hinted to Dolores, who could tell what dreadful trouble might follow? Well and cleverly as the lost court was concealed, no doubt an architect, sent to make examination, might at once detect discrepancies which would prove the existence and even the position of what had remained hidden for so many years.

It seemed to the girl that it was wholly through her fault that this danger threatened the prisoner. He had left his safe hiding place to see her. To protect her, he had shown himself to Lord Tillingbourne; and in jealousy and anger Lord Tillingbourne must have gone straight to Lady Desmond, whose suspicions had been already roused by the imprudently worn miniature.

"If harm comes to him it will be all through me," Dolores said to herself. "Somehow, I must let him know what is hap-

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pening. Perhaps if he knew, he would go away before people could begin spying and watching."

But how to reach him with the bad news she had to tell—that was the problem.

He had bidden her good-by, and said—for some reason she could not understand—that they must not meet again. Then he had gone, leaving her no time to argue or plead, even if she would. Half stunned, she had had to submit to his decision; and even when she had returned to the ballroom to keep her engagement with De Gray, always the words had echoed in her ears: "Never to see him again. Never to see him again."

But now everything was changed. Somehow she must contrive to warn him that through her fault he was in danger, and to beg that he would leave Queen's Quadrangles before it should be too late.

There was not much time, for Lady Desmond had said that she would come next day at twelve, and no matter what Dolores might try to do or say to quiet her suspicions and turn them in another way if they had already been aroused and were on the right track, there was very little hope of success.

Lady Desmond had stared at the locket as if she hated the face that looked back at her from the ivory, and she had said terrible things. She would have said more if Dolores had consented to listen. No mercy could be expected from Nina, the girl thought, if she had any object of her own to gain by betraying one whom she seemed to regard as an enemy to be feared and hated. Therefore if anything were to be accomplished it should be done before to-morrow morning.

By four o'clock the old house—a little while earlier bright with lights and gay with music—had returned to that dark-

ness and silence which had bound it as in a spell for many a year.

Mistress, guests, and tired servants slept, as Dolores stole down from the room where her mother had wished her "sweet dreams," and crept back into the great dark library.

The moon had traveled far on her journey toward the west, and no jeweled rays streamed through the stained-glass window, nor was there yet any light of dawn. The big square of the many-colored window glimmered faintly in the darkness, that was all; but Dolores carried a candle, whose flame streamed in a smoky pennon as she moved toward the door of the bookroom.

Her one hope was that the prisoner of the lost court might hear her if she tapped on the wall. Where he slept she did not know, for she had never seen the upper story of the little house built round two sides of the lost court; and if his sleeping room were on the east side, he would not hear knocking on the wall of the bookroom. Even if he had not gone to bed, and should be sitting in the room of the Spanish pictures, he could not hear. It was only when in his room of books, which backed against this other bookroom, that he was able to give or receive signals. Still, she could but try.

Softly she shut the door between the bookroom and the library beyond. Then, pulling out half a dozen books, as usual, she tapped sharply on the oak behind the shelf.

No answer came. There was no sound on the other side. Again she knocked more loudly; and again there was no reply but silence. She waited, and knocked a third time, with the same result; and then, desperate at her failure, beat with her little fist against the wainscoting.

Silence—always silence!

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What was she to do?

The deadly stillness of the sleeping house, only emphasized by the strange crackings and creakings which come inexplicably in old, old rooms at night, intensified her fears for the man whose hidden life was passed on the other side of the wall. It seemed, at this hour when the tired world slept and vital forces were at ebb, as if any horror were possible. Before the eyes of Dolores's mind rose the face of Nina Desmond, no longer beautiful, no longer fascinating by virtue of its famous smile, but malignant, merciless as a mask of Nemesis.

Dolores was afraid of everything, of every mysterious creak and whisper and rustle which made up the night silence; but most of all, of Lady Desmond, whose presence seemed near her, like an evil thing hiding in the shadow.

When she had knocked a dozen times in vain, the girl remembered one other way that she might take.

There was the secret door at the end of the long corridor, through which she usually returned after a visit to the lost court. She would not dare to knock on account of Lady Rosamund, even if a knock could be heard so far off as at the end of the passage; but there must be some means of opening the door from this side: a hidden spring; a tiny knob to push; something which would send the door sliding back, as she had often seen it slide while waiting to pass out.

She had never been allowed to go in by that way, for at the hour when she went to pay her visits there was always some danger that Lady Rosamund might be up and about in one of the rooms close at hand. But now it was much later than the latest hour at which she had ever returned, and there could be no fear that Lady Rosamund was still out of bed.

Frances had timidly asked her housekeeper if she would not like to see the fountain court after it was illuminated, or perhaps peep at the guests in their fancy dress, from a little window made for such purposes, behind the musicians' gallery in the ballroom. But Lady Rosamund, thanking her quietly, had answered that she was rather tired, and would go to bed early. When Frances had hoped that she might not be disturbed by the music, she had said that she would scarcely hear it so far away, and even if she did, she would sleep the more soundly in the hours after the guests had gone.

"She ought to be fast asleep now," thought Dolores. "Besides, I shan't make any noise."

Carrying her candle, the girl tiptoed softly through the long corridor that led from the library into the long gallery. Parker had been told not to wait up after the ball, and Dolores was still in her Undine dress; but the crystal beads and fringes made so light a tinkling as she moved that even a listening ear could not have heard from behind closed doors.

Standing at last before the paneled wall at the end of the gallery where she knew that the secret door existed, with raised candle the girl patiently searched for the hidden spring which must be there. Her finger pressed and pried into each small inequality of the oak, testing even a worm hole which was larger than its fellows.

The paneling was fashioned in squares, and as Dolores already knew from many interested glances cautiously thrown in passing, it was impossible for an uninitiated eye to detect the secret door. Now, even though she knew exactly where it was, she could not trace its lines; but at last her searching finger found what seemed to be a nail head. She pushed, and felt it yield under her touch.

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Then came the familiar click which she had often heard on the other side of the door, and the panel slid back.

When manipulated by the ghost, who knew its ways so well, its sliding was gentle, almost inaudible. But Dolores must have left something undone which ought to have been done, for instead of moving with smooth slowness, the panel flashed back into the wall with the sharp clap of a slammed wooden blind.

Dolores felt as if her blood were turning to water in her sick fear of the harm that might be done; but she could only go on; and, the candle dripping wax in her trembling grasp, she was in the act of slipping through the narrow space when a key turned sharply, and Lady Rosamund Vane-Eliot stood framed in the doorway of her own bedroom.

For an instant the girl and the woman looked at each other, terror in Dolores's eyes, anger beyond matching with words in Lady Rosamund's. Then the tall figure, with falling hair white as the night dress it cloaked, sprang forward, swift as the lightning of a look, and caught the girl back from the open panel.

"How dare you?" Lady Rosamund demanded in a whisper more piercing than a cry. "Treacherous—wicked girl! And I liked you. I thought you sweet and true."

"I am not treacherous," Dolores panted. "I only-"

"You must have bad blood in your veins, or you would not turn spy to satisfy a vulgar, cruel curiosity. You can't be one of our Eliots. You and your mother must leave this house to-morrow. Go to your room now. But—one moment first. Some one has told you that there was a secret door here, and perhaps gossiped of what might be behind it. There is noth-

ing behind it to gratify your curiosity—nothing. But if, while you remain in this house, or after you have gone away, you talk of what you may have heard and the little you have seen, I will have you dealt with by the law for a scandal-monger. That is all. You can go."

Sick, and deathly white, Dolores staggered from under the hand upon her shoulder, which threw her off as if she were some noxious thing; and half fainting she tottered away without a word.

To save her life, she could not have spoken again in self-defense. She felt as if she were dying, and she wished to die.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

EARLY IN THE MORNING

FTERWARDS, when she found herself once more in her own room, scarcely remembering how she had got there, the girl wondered at herself for not having insisted on justice from Lady Rosamund Vane-Eliot.

She realized then how weak she had been, to let herself be broken like a snapped reed by the woman's ruthless grasp. She ought to have stood firm, to have protested, even when Lady Rosamund forbade her to speak. She should not have endured such insults in a silence which consented to them all, but ought to have explained something of her motive in coming to the secret door.

Yet, ought she to have explained? she wondered, on top of self-reproaches.

Suppose that it should bring trouble upon the prisoner of the lost court, if Lady Rosamund knew that he had received and encouraged visits from a stranger? Evidently, whatever her relations with the hidden man, she had never yet been told of those visits, and he must have had good reasons for concealment. On second thoughts, therefore, while tingling with shame because she had stood tongue-tied, powerless for self-justification, Dolores was glad that she had entered into no explanations. And though she longed that Lady Rosamund should know how utterly she had been misjudged, she

did not dare go back to insist again that she had done no wrong.

It was daylight before she undressed; and then she did not go to bed, for she knew that she could not sleep, and she did not wish to sleep. She felt that there were many things for her to do, if only she could be sure what was best, and what she ought to set about doing first.

Lady Rosamund Vane-Eliot had said that mother and daughter must leave the house. Probably Lady Rosamund would seek Mrs. Eliot in the morning without waiting for Dolores to tell her story; but Frances and her guests planned to sleep till ten, and then breakfast in their rooms. Dolores thought that her mother would not be ready to come down before eleven, and she told herself that Lady Rosamund would not force herself upon her tenant before she was dressed.

What might be said by the two women if they met Dolores could not guess, but she determined to see her mother before Lady Rosamund had a chance to speak. Think as she might, however, she could not make up her mind what would be wisest to say about their going from Queen's Quadrangles.

Sweet-natured and dovelike as Frances was, her daughter knew that the dove's feathers would ruffle in defense of her young. The gentle lips would answer with angry word, imprudent words perhaps, to any aspersion against her child; and Dolores feared to tell all the truth, lest the secret should inadvertently be let out, not only to Lady Rosamund, who probably knew, but to others who did not and must not know. Better that Frances should fancy her daughter foolishly changeable, or even guilty of some shameful indiscretion, than have the secret of the lost court bandied about.

If only she herself knew what that secret really was, and

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how serious for those concerned the consequences of its discovery might be! Dolores thought over and over again. If she knew that, then she would know just how much harm Lady Desmond could do, should she be cruel enough to talk of the ghost, and hint to outsiders that he had an existence in the flesh.

It seemed impossible now to warn him of danger, but if she could learn at least what his connection was with Queen's Quadrangles and Lady Rosamund Vane-Eliot, she might perhaps go to Lady Rosamund herself and bid her give the necessary warning.

The friend whom she would save asked nothing of her beyond that she would be deaf to gossip; and though she had had opportunities of satisfying curiosity, she had never taken them. But the girl felt now that if she could learn the prisoner's story from lips which would not malign him, she might be able to save him yet from the consequences of danger risked for her sake. Best of all would it have been to hear the tale as he could tell it; but since that might not be, she must think of some one else to go to—some one kind of heart, some one without malice, who would not talk for sheer morbid love of horror.

And she did think of some one else.

It was very early in the morning, as she bathed and dressed, soon after sunrise, that the thought came to her of the little ladies of Turk's Cottage.

They knew the tragedy of Queen's Quadrangles; that tragedy in which the hidden man of the lost court must have played some leading part. They did not gloat upon the thought of it with appetite, as did Mrs. Calendar and other women whom the girl had met. They had not ceased visiting

at Queen's Quadrangles because everybody else turned their backs upon the place, nor had they begun running there again because of the duke and other great ones, who set the fashion of knowing the new tenants. They had stopped away, Dolores thought, out of respect to Lady Rosamund, not because they shunned her; and they had not come when others came, still out of respect to her. And Dolores liked them better for not calling than she liked more important people for calling often.

She would go to the Misses Greenleaf, she decided, and beg them to tell her the secret of the dear old house from which she was to be sent away disgraced.

Once she had made up her mind to this plan, the girl revived a little.

She knew that the little ladies called themselves "early birds," and once or twice when she had been enterprising enough to take a walk before breakfast, she had seen them in their big mushroom hats working in their garden.

Perhaps they might be surprised when she knocked at their door at an hour when most people were thinking of getting up, but in a minute she would explain that she had come on an errand of importance. She would say that it was necessary for her to hear the truth about Queen's Quadrangles; that she could not fully explain why, but that if she knew all, she might be able to prevent great evil from being done. Then they would be surprised no longer, and they would be very kind she knew.

She was out of the house by half past seven, and just as the far-away church clock at Clere struck eight she was lifting the old-fashioned knocker on the little, black front door of Turk's Cottage.

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The twin sisters were at breakfast in the low-ceilinged hall which was their sitting room, and as the stiffly starched Lauretta opened the door, they both sprang up with exactly the chirp of surprise Dolores had anticipated.

"Why, my dear, you up and out at eight o'clock, after your ball!" exclaimed Miss Poppy. "It's quite like the girls of our time. Not many of that sort among the young people nowadays."

"What a dear child to come and tell us about the dance," said Miss Peachy. "We thought of you, and wished we could have seen you in the pretty dress you said you were getting made in London. I'm sure everything must have been a great success, and that you looked perfectly beautiful."

The sweet-faced old ladies with their pleasant chatter were almost too much for Dolores's self-control. Something seemed to choke her, and tears burned her eyes, though she smiled thanks for her welcome.

Instantly they saw that she had not come to talk of her successes at the ball. The two faces, which looked as if they had been carefully cut from the same pattern, became grave; but the sisters went on chatting as before, to keep up appearances while Lauretta was in the room.

Had their dear child had her breakfast? Not yet? Why then, Lauretta must bring in some hot coffee and fresh toast. Oh, this poor lamb mustn't refuse. They would listen to nothing about last night until she had eaten and drunk. So she ceased to resist, and when to please her friends she had swallowed half a cup of coffee and crumbled a little toast, she found that they were right. She felt better able to go through with what might lie before her.

Soon Lauretta was told that her mistresses could spare her

for the rest of the meal, and that she might run to the post office with the letters instead of waiting until she had cleared the table and washed the dishes.

"Dearie, we can't help seeing from your poor little pale face that something serious has happened," began Miss Poppy, "and it's a great compliment to us that you should come here and let us try to advise you; because I think that's what you have come for, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Dolores. "I knew you'd help me."

"Why, of course. We're used to helping girls out of their troubles," said Miss Poppy cheerfully. "We were 'schoolma'ams' for years; and our girls were never afraid even of me—while as for Peachy, they did what they liked with her. But I believe they loved us, which was what we wanted, and we loved them."

"There wasn't one as sweet and dear as you, child," added Miss Peachy, "so you can think how glad we are to have you come to us."

"Has some young man been making love to you, and you're not quite sure what you want to say to him?" inquired Miss Poppy, seeing that the girl hesitated to begin, and anxious to encourage her.

"It isn't like that," Dolores answered. "It's real trouble—not just a tiny worry. The worst of it is that I can't explain everything even to you, who are both so kind, but—I've come to beg that you'll tell me the thing that happened years ago to make Queen's Quadrangles different from other places."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Miss Peachy. "Some gossiping creature has been talking to you. We were always afraid of that. No nice person would have mentioned the subject to

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you or your mother; and, indeed, it's never been considered quite good taste to talk of it even among ourselves."

"Good taste doesn't matter now," said the girl wearily. "It's gone beyond that. I've known for a long time that there was something dreadful—something tragic, but I didn't want to hear what it was, any more than—than the nice people wanted to tell me. But now I must know, and I've come to beg you for all the truth. It's only in that way you can help me."

THE STORY AS THEY TOLD IT

ISS POPPY and Miss Peachy glanced at each other with perturbed blue eyes, over Dolores's bowed head, but after a moment's silence Miss Poppy spoke, gently and gravely.

"Very well, dear," she said. "I know you wouldn't come to us with such a request unless you had a good reason. You shall hear the story. It's a very sad one, and—you were right about its being tragic."

"Oh, what a pity, what a pity, she must be told such bad and horrible things!" wailed Miss Peachy.

"Never mind, dear; we must make it as little horrible for her to hear as we can, without hiding anything," said Miss Poppy. "But—before we begin (and you must prompt me, Peachy, if I forget things) I'd better ask, child, exactly what you have been told?"

"Nothing, except that there was something mysterious and tragic which suddenly changed Lady Rosamund Vane-Eliot's life, and made her a different woman, wanting to go nowhere and see no one."

- "You haven't heard anyone speak of her son?"
- "Only to say that he had died. What was he like?"
- "My dear, he was one of the handsomest, most brilliant young men who ever lived, and everyone thought one of the noblest and most delightful. Lady Rosamund adored him."

"So did we all," murmured Miss Peachy. "He was the most beautiful boy!"

"His name was Anthony," went on Miss Poppy, in a subdued voice, very different from her usual cheery tone. "His father died when he was a child, and when he was about twelve years old he became 'Sir Anthony.' He was at Eton then, and we used to hear that he was one of the most popular boys who'd ever been in the school."

"I can see him now," sighed Miss Peachy, "home for his holidays, in his Eton jacket and big white collar, taking off his tall, shiny hat to the people he met, and showing his curly chestnut head. That was when we had our school, and the girls used to be wild about him."

"Never mind that, Peachy," said her sister. "His cousin, Paul Vane, used often to come with him to spend those holidays at Queen's Quadrangles, which was Lady Rosamund's favorite place, though she had another then—or rather, Anthony had it, for of course everything was his on his father's death. The cousin was much his elder, seven or eight years, for he was one of the old boys at Eton when Anthony first went as one of the youngest; but he was as handsome as Anthony in his way, and Anthony looked up to and almost worshiped him, as little boys do big boys growing toward manhood. Paul Vane was a hero for poor Anthony."

"Paul Vane!" echoed Dolores. "Lady Desmond's brother?"

"Yes. Did you ever meet him, dear?"

"I saw him once, at a hotel in London," said the girl, "but I didn't know who he was then. He was with Lady Desmond and another lady, younger than she, though not as handsome or interesting."

"That must have been his wife: his second wife," broke in Miss Peachy. "Oh, if you could have seen the first one! She was indeed a beauty. Lady Desmond, at her best, wasn't a patch upon her. They used to be considered rivals, though they were cousins, and became sisters-in-law."

"That doesn't belong in this story that we're trying to tell," Miss Poppy reminded her twin.

"Why, yes it does, in its way, for it was through her that all the dreadful things happened!" Miss Peachy cried.

"We'll come to that part presently," Miss Poppy went quietly on. "Anthony and Lady Rosamund were left poorly off, considering the estates they had to keep up, but Anthony went to Oxford when he was just eighteen; and all his long vacations he spent abroad, painting, for he had a real genius as an artist, and his pictures made quite a sensation everywhere, even in Paris. Soon he could sell anything he liked to paint for hundreds of pounds. That was a joy to his mother, for Lady Rosamund is a proud woman, and she couldn't bear to see her son's estates going to pieces for want of money."

"She was the happiest woman in those days you can imagine!" cried Miss Peachy, "and she looked young enough to be Anthony's sister. She'd always been a great beauty, and men had lost their heads over her. Anthony used to pet and spoil her as if she were a child—just as his father had before him, and there was no woman in the county so much admired and sought after as she. If she'd liked, she could have married a dozen times over, but she was wrapped up in her son and in Queen's Quadrangles, which people used to say in old days she'd accepted Sir Digby Vane-Eliot on purpose to get. 'As for the other place, Vane Towers, though it

brought in more rent, she never cared much for it; which was a good thing, as Anthony's heir, Paul Vane, has it now; with the title and all—for he had to make his name over into Vane-Eliot."

"Dear, dear, you're wandering from the story again," Miss Poppy prompted her sister. "Dolores has come to hear about the tragedy that broke the old, pleasant life, not about the life itself. We might talk of that for hours and never get to the real point."

"Where does the real point begin?" asked Miss Peachy, bridling a little.

"With the coming of Elinor Vane to Queen's Quadrangles," Miss Poppy answered. "She was another cousin, you must know—a cousin of Paul Vane's, and a cousin of Anthony Vane-Eliot's—left an orphan and very poor. She was younger than Paul, but a few months older than Anthony, and though she was nearer of kin to Paul's family, they wouldn't keep her with them when she was growing up. She was too beautiful to live in the same house with Nina Vane, who was a couple of years older than she, and was being trained by a very ambitious mother to make a great match. It wouldn't have done at all to handicap Nina with a rival handsomer and younger than herself."

"How sharp you are, Poppy!" cried her sister. "One would think you hated all the Vanes to hear you talk like that, and yet you never saw any of them except Elinor and Paul, whom you used to admire immensely; and Nina since she married and became a widow."

"They were a wicked lot those Vanes. One heard plenty of things about them; and if there hadn't been something wrong, Sir Digby wouldn't have quarreled with the whole

family, for he was a peaceable man. If he'd been alive when Paul and Anthony met at Eton, I dare say Paul would never have been asked to stay at Queen's Quadrangles, no matter how attractive and fine a fellow he himself might have been. But Lady Rosamund, being alone, chose to please Anthony, whose hero Paul was, as I said. As to Elinor's being taken into the house, that was a duty and a charity, not a pleasure—at least until they grew fond of her. Nina was never invited, and I don't know that she ever even saw Lady Rosamund, though Anthony, after great persuasions, used to be allowed occasionally to visit Paul in London.

"Well, Elinor Vane, who hadn't a penny of her own, and who'd been practically turned out by Nina and her mother when she was nineteen, wrote to Lady Rosamund (at least, that's what I've always believed she did) begging for a home, to save her from going out as a governess or lady's companion. She offered to help Lady Rosamund for payment, but of course Lady Rosamund didn't want any help she could give. She took the girl in partly because it would be a family disgrace that Elinor Vane should take some subordinate position with strangers, and partly, maybe, because she liked to feel that she could be more generous to a Vane than the Vanes themselves. Anyway, Elinor came, and the next thing was that everyone was saying she and Anthony were falling in love with each other."

"They were certainly the most beautiful young couple to see together!" put in Miss Peachy, with a sigh for the past.

"That's true," Miss Poppy admitted, "but I don't think they looked beautiful together to Lady Rosamund. She thought there'd been enough marrying of cousins in the fam-

ily; besides, the girl hadn't a penny, and the thing was for Anthony to marry money, to keep up the estates as they hadn't been kept up since some terribly bad speculations of his father, Sir Digby. Still, I don't think Lady Rosamund could have opposed Anthony, when she found his heart was set upon having his cousin, if something hadn't happened which changed the whole situation.

"It was about a year after Anthony left Oxford. He was only twenty-three, and had settled down to look after his estates, doing so well that there was hope of freeing them from mortgages that had been pressing since Sir Digby's day. Anthony had been paid high for several pictures, too; and everything was going prosperously with the Vane-Eliots when Paul Vane arrived at Queen's Quadrangles to pay a visit, on leave from St. Petersburg, where he'd become something or other, I'm sure I don't know what, in the diplomatic service.

"He'd been away a long time, and had distinguished himself, people said. To my eye, he wasn't improved, for he'd grown very haughty and pleased with himself, though he was handsomer than ever, and looked quite a man of the world—as indeed he ought, being already twenty-nine and used to traveling everywhere.

"It was some years since he'd seen Elinor, who'd worn her hair down her back and short dresses when he went away—thanks to Nina's mother, who kept her back all she could, not to have her in Nina's way. She'd grown a beauty; and from the first minute of his coming to Queen's Quadrangles she made a dead set at Paul. That may be a vulgar expression, my dear, and I wouldn't have you use it, but it tells exactly what she did, better than any other that comes to my

min. In spite of her lovely face and pleasant ways, Elinor wane was a minx."

"Perhaps she was in love with her cousin," ventured Dolores, who had always an impulse to defend those who were abused, even when there was little question of their guilt.

"So she was in love with her cousin," said Miss Poppy briskly, "but it was her cousin Anthony, not Paul. It was her ambition which weighed more with her than the love of years -for it was over three years that she'd been with Lady Rosamund and Anthony; and in the four or five since she'd seen Paul Vane he had made all his successes. Anthony had a title, to be sure, but it was only a baronetcy, and if he was to have any money, it must come from hard work as an artist. He loved his name; and to keep the estates from falling into ruin, he must take care of them himself, as he couldn't afford to pay or to trust anyone else to do it. That meant that he'd never be more than a country gentleman, and an artist selling a picture or two a year-for he was too conscientious in his work to paint fast. Whereas, with Paul Vane, people were saying there was no height he wouldn't reach in diplomacy. His mother and his sister Nina had only enough money to live the life such women must live; but a distant relation who admired Paul-everyone admired Paul!-died and left him eight thousand a year. That was a great help in his profession, as you can see; and he was so clever and so ambitious there didn't seem much doubt of his eventually getting a title, if he worked for it.

"Besides, the life he led in great capitals, in the most interesting circles, and in the midst of exciting events, was exactly the sort of life Elinor Vane wanted. What did she care for the admiration she could get in such a neighborhood

as this, or for a few weeks of the season in London? She longed to have the world at her feet.

"I suppose she did have some kind of a struggle, for she'd been as much in love with Anthony as it was in her to be; and though they'd never been actually engaged (because, I think, Anthony'd promised his mother not to marry until the mortgages were paid off), there was probably some understanding between the two. In any case, before Paul Vane had been a week in the house he'd asked Elinor to marry him, and she'd said Yes. No doubt he fell in love with her; but I'm sure he saw, too, that she was just the sort of girl he ought to marry; one who would help him in his career, as a less beautiful and brilliant woman couldn't, no matter what her position or wealth."

"Poppy and I always had an idea," broke in Miss Peachy sagely, "that Elinor must have gone straight to Anthony and appealed to his chivalry, begging him not to let Paul know that there'd been anything between them, for haughty as Paul had grown, he was still fond of Anthony, and we thought he wouldn't have been mean enough to propose to the girl if he knew Anthony wanted her."

"Yes, that was our theory," said Miss Poppy. "And as for Anthony, there'd never been anyone like Paul for him. All these years he'd kept up the same hero-worship for his elder cousin, though they'd not been together for so long. Never did we see him at this cottage, where he used often to come, but he had something to say of Paul and Paul's career; and they corresponded always. Fond as he was of Elinor—his first boy's love—I suppose it must have been a kind of joy to sacrifice himself for Paul's happiness. That would have been his nature; for I used to tell him sometimes

that he wasn't selfish enough. A queer fault to complain of in a boy or young man. But it was Anthony's fault. He used to give up things to others that he ought to have kept himself."

"Once, for instance," eagerly added Miss Peachy, "there was the question of a prize for the best picture, when he was studying art, as a boy. He wanted it, of course, and everyone who knew thought he was sure to get it. But another boy, whose whole future depended on success, was his rival, and what should Anthony do but help that other boy with his picture, and help him so well that he carried off the first prize, and Anthony got only second! It all came out afterwards, through the other boy, for Anthony never said a word about what he'd done, not even to Lady Rosamund."

"That was the kind of fault angels might have," exclaimed Dolores.

"Yes," said Miss Poppy, "but he had some human ones, too. He was dreadfully hot-tempered, though, if he'd lived to grow older, he would have conquered himself, I'm sure; he tried hard enough. But he inherited quick rages from his father, who once nearly killed a groom for kicking a horse. That was one thing which went against poor Anthony when the tragedy came. But as Peachy says, we always thought Elinor must have thrown herself on his generosity, for apparently Paul had no idea that he wasn't quite the all-conquering hero with the girl that he was with other people, men and women. I'm sure he was confident that Elinor had never cared for anyone else, and that she'd fallen in love with him at first sight.

"They were married after a short engagement and went to St. Petersburg. As for Anthony, he loved his mother too

much to let her see that he was unhappy; but to us he seemed changed. Before Elinor's engagement he was so gay and light-hearted, and hopeful about everything, it was a pleasure to have him come into the house! It was impossible to be despondent where he was, no matter what might have happened to make you cross. You never saw such joy of life as he had till after his disappointment, but though he used to seem very jolly and keep us laughing, much as he did before, he looked older, and his gayety sometimes seemed a little forced.

"Perhaps Lady Rosamund guessed, though he took such pains to hide his feelings from her; but anyway she thought a change would do him good, and when one of those new millionaires, who are always springing up, wanted Anthony to go to London and paint a portrait group of his children, Lady Rosamund urged him to accept the offer. So he went, and gossip used to come down to us from the Chilfords and others who knew what was going on in society that he was seeing a good deal of his cousin, Nina Vane. She was twenty-five or six already, and a beauty who'd refused several good offers, though she wasn't rich—for Lord Desmond hadn't appeared on the scene yet. He was a political peer, and a great friend of Paul's later."

"Did Anthony learn to care about—his other cousin?" asked Dolores.

"Well, the gossip was that Nina liked him better than he did her, and that if he'd asked, she would have taken him, mortgages and all. But that was only gossip. It was the sort of thing people outside can never know for certain," Miss Peachy said. "And now we're coming close to the tragedy.

"It was nearly a year after Elinor's marriage that Lady Rosamund persuaded Anthony to go to stop in town and do the portrait, while she looked after things in the country. And while he was still there, painting, and perhaps amusing himself a little, Paul Vane came quite suddenly back to England with his wife. He was promoted to the embassy in London, which was a splendid thing for him, and he and Elinor ought to have been the happiest couple in the world, as they seemed the most fortunate. But something was wrong between them; everyone noticed that they were no longer lovers in manner. Paul had grown cynical, and haughtier than before. Elinor had developed into a flirt-which she always was at heart-and Paul didn't approve of her very up-todate notions of her duties as a wife. There was a story that they'd quarreled over the attentions of one of the Russian grand dukes; and that not only was that the reason Paul had tried to get away from St. Petersburg, but that things had never been the same between him and Elinor since."

"Elinor wasn't quite as pretty as she had been, either; you mustn't forget to tell that," Miss Peachy reminded her sister. "St. Petersburg hadn't agreed with her, and she'd lost her wonderful coloring. We did hear that she couldn't sleep well, and that she used some drug for her ner es—something that changes people's whole natures if they get used to it—morphine, perhaps. And if that was true, maybe she wasn't entirely responsible for all the indiscreet things she did in the next few months to get herself talked about."

"She was handsome enough still to be called the prettiest woman in England that season," said Miss Poppy. "She made a great sensation as a married woman and the wife of such an important man as Paul Vane was getting to be.

She had everyone she wanted at her parties, from the king down; and there was a judge, who used in those days to be called the 'hanging judge,' and so a silly pun was made about his hanging after her. But there were plenty of others to keep him company. One young man—the very one Anthony had helped to get the prize for a picture years before -was almost mad about Mrs. Vane. She flirted with him outrageously, too, and then got so tired of him that she wouldn't have him near her. He took revenge by painting a picture which was the image of Elinor, and naming it 'Circe.' It was clever and terrible, and he had it exhibited at a private show in Bond Street. That made more talk than ever, but Elinor didn't seem to care. My belief is, that the one thing she did care about was to get Anthony Vane-Eliot back. She'd probably found out her mistake in making a loveless marriage, and learned to value Anthony a hundred times more after she'd lost him."

"And did she get him back?" asked Dolores, almost in a whisper; for though Anthony Vane-Eliot was mentioned in the past tense, as one who had been dead for many years, the girl's heart spoke to her of his real identity. What was coming—what was the nature of the tragedy they hinted at, she did not know yet, and she dreaded to hear. Nevertheless she felt that it was not the tragedy of a stranger.

"Ah, that was what everybody was wondering!" cried Miss Poppy. "You know the difference, my dear, between 'Mirabeau judged by his friends, and Mirabeau judged by the people?' Well, we were Anthony's friends, and we were sure he was too loyal to his hero and to his own self-respect to make love to Paul's wife, even if he still cared for her as he once did. But—he was a great deal at the house, and

must have been sorely tempted. Paul didn't know about the past, or suspect anything in the present, and though Anthony was so much younger, he was the most intimate friend he'd ever had, as well as his cousin. It was natural enough Paul should want Anthony to be there; and then his mother married for the second time to Nina's great disgust. Nina went and lived with her brother and Elinor in Carlton House Terrace; and we used to say, when people made disagreeable remarks about Anthony and Elinor, that perhaps he was in the house more for Nina's sake than hers.

"Be that as it may, the crash came, and nothing we could say was of any use, because the awful thing had happened, and whatever the motive, there was no denying it.

"One night there had been a ball at some great house—I've forgotten whose—but it was the climax of the season, in the last days of July. Paul Vane had been in Paris on some diplomatic errand, and Anthony went with Elinor and Nina to the ball. After it was over he took them home, and they must have asked him in. Later, it came out that he had appeared to be annoyed with Elinor at the ball—that hot temper of his!—and he'd been overheard in the conservatory violently reproaching her for something, as if he were very angry. He was angry still when he took his two cousins back to Carlton House Terrace, and I suppose the same subject of dispute was carried on, for there was a terrible scene, and he shot her dead."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Dolores. "Don't say that he killed her! Don't tell me it was that!"

"Yes, it was that," said Miss Poppy very sadly. "He killed her. But oh, my dear, how pale you are! You are such a sympathetic little soul, you feel everything so keenly.

That's why I hated to tell you this long story, which has such a dreadful ending. I knew it would grieve you. But you must remember, dear, it all happened a long, long time ago, and poor Anthony has been out of his agony and shame for many years."

Dolores bowed her head that the two little ladies might not see the quivering of her lips, and clasped her hands tightly together to hide their trembling.

"For many years—yes," she echoed. "But—you've made him seem real to me—in hearing his story. A man like that wouldn't have killed a woman."

"Ah, that was what we said!" sighed Miss Peachy. "But he confessed that he had done it. Then we had to believe, though we felt then, and have ever since, that she must in some way have given him the most terrible provocation. She knew his temper! She had no right to strain it to breaking point. And there was a revolver lying on a desk close by (for the thing happened in Paul Vane's study), she must have known it was there, for it was her husband's; and in the evidence afterwards it appeared that Paul always kept the revolver loaded in a box on that desk."

"Anthony shot her through the lungs," went on Miss Poppy, "and she didn't die instantly. Nina was in the room through the whole scene; and three minutes after, before Elinor was dead, Paul came. He'd got back from Paris sooner than he expected, and though he'd arrived in London early in the evening, rather than be urged by his wife to go to the ball he dined at some quiet restaurant, came home late, and had gone to sleep before the three arrived in the house. It was the sound of the shot which waked him up and a scream from Nina. He hurried down, just in time to see Elinor die, and

to hear her say 'This is Anthony's work.' Then he turned to Anthony and asked him if it were true that he had killed her; and, after being silent for a moment, Anthony answered that it was true."

- "And Nina-Lady Desmond?" breathed Dolores.
- "Oh, I don't know what she did then. She must have been half dead herself with the horror of such a scene; but afterwards, when she was called as a witness, she simply said that, seeing what was about to happen, she screamed, and remembered nothing more."
- "Didn't she tell why Anthony was so angry with Elinor? Didn't she try to say something which might help him?" Dolores implored.
- "Well, you see she couldn't do much to help. Anthony admitted that he'd cared for his cousin Elinor years before, and that it had made him unhappy to have her marry Paul. Still worse, he confessed to loving her after she was married, when she'd come back with her husband to live in London; and though he swore that she didn't think of him except as a cousin, and that in nothing was she to blame toward her husband or toward him, he didn't deny that he'd been jealous of what he called 'her innocent flirtations,' and that he'd reproached her for one of them at the ball, and afterwards in Paul's study just before he shot her. Nina's story tallied with his, so far as she told a story at all, for she was ill after the awful thing, and she was spared by the lawyers as much as possible."
 - "Was Anthony-put in prison?" Dolores asked.
- "Of course he went to prison as a confessed murderer, but there might in the end have been a verdict for manslaughter or something of that sort, which the lawyers get up to

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save people who have had some excuse for their crime, but—the judge who used to admire Elinor Vane was the one who tried him, and he summed up dead against the prisoner. People said it was almost as if he advised the jury to convict; and Anthony was condemned to be hanged."

"Do be careful, Poppy!" cried Miss Peachy. "The child is almost fainting—and who can wonder, when she's living in the house which was the poor fellow's dearly loved home!"

"No—no, I shan't faint," stammered Dolores, sickly pale.
"Please go on, Miss Poppy. Tell me—all."

"There was a petition for him, signed by many important persons, but the Home Secretary answered that he didn't see his way to granting it," went on the old lady. "People wrote letters to the newspapers against Anthony, too, calling themselves 'Socialists,' 'Friends of Justice,' and that kind of thing, saying it would be a disgrace to England if a man were let off because he had money and a title, when, if ever a murderer deserved to suffer for a dastardly crime, it was Sir Anthony Vane-Eliot. No one talked of anything else for weeks and months, and you can imagine the state of mind down here, where there have been Vane-Eliots since Tudor days. Some of Lady Rosamund's old friends showed great lack of tact about the way they tried to testify their sympathy with her after Anthony's confession of guilt. She resented it passionately, and didn't discriminate as she might have done, for she seemed to have the idea that everyone was against Anthony. She refused to see anybody; and old Soames, the butler, who always opened the door to visitors even in those days, used simply to glare at people, as if he would have liked to kill them, or at least slam the door in their faces. Some deserved it, maybe—those who went out

of curiosity; yet there were many who didn't, many who were sorry from their hearts not only for Lady Rosamund, but for Anthony. And there was a gloom over the whole neighborhood—almost over the whole country—after the day was fixed for the poor boy's death. Only think, he wasn't five and twenty! and though he wasn't rich, or a grand parti, he was so brilliant, so clever and gay and handsome, that he was more popular than many richer and more important young men. Oh, dear, even now, when he's been in his grave these nine years, I can't bear to think of that dreadful time! Peachy and I were almost ill, we were so miserable. As for Lady Rosamund, his poor mother, I daren't think what she must have suffered. I did hear that her hair turned white in a fortnight, but I don't know if it's true. If you'll believe me, none of us have ever seen her from that day to this. She was in London from the time of Anthony's arrest till his death, moving Heaven and earth to save him, and when she came back after it was all over to Queen's Quadrangles, it was supposed that she arrived in the night. Not once has she been seen outside the gates since."

"Her hair is white," Dolores almost whispered. "But—you haven't told me yet how—he died."

"Thank Heaven, he died in his cell two days before he was to have been—executed," answered Miss Poppy, as pale and agitated now as if the events of which she told had happened but yesterday. "Heart failure was the verdict of the prison doctor, and everyone said, 'Thank God!' when they heard the news. It was as if the whole county had been unexpectedly saved from a terrible disgrace. And I should think even the —prison authorities, and the people who would have had to —kill him, were thankful to be spared such a dreadful duty.

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Where he was buried we never knew—nobody knew except those who arranged it, I suppose; but we have always had the idea that Lady Rosamund got permission to bring the body away with her, and that the poor, unfortunate boy lies somewhere at Queen's——"

"Oh, Poppy, ought you to tell her that?" cried Miss Peachy. "It may frighten the child to feel——"

"Nonsense," said Miss Poppy. "She's too sensible; and, besides, she asked to hear all. Now she has heard all. For that's the very end of the sad story, so far as it concerns Anthony Vane-Eliot or his mother; except that, because he'd broken the entail and left Queen's Quadrangles to her, Paul Vane thought he had been treated with great injustice. Nina, too, used to go about saying that not only had Anthony disgraced the whole family, and taken his brother's wife from him, but he had robbed Paul of his rightful inheritance as well. She married Lord Desmond within two years, and was a widow before five had passed. As for Paul, he seemed completely broken for a while, and retired from the diplomatic service, but a couple of years ago he married for the second time an enormously rich, youngish woman, quite different from Elinor, very quiet, and not at all a beauty, but devoted to him."

"Did he try to save his cousin Anthony, who had loved him so much?" asked Dolores.

"Who knows?" returned Miss Poppy. "Perhaps he did. But there were those who said he wanted Anthony to suffer—that he had no forgiveness for him in his heart."

"And-Lady Desmond?"

"I don't think we are competent to judge her. But there must be something frivolous in her nature, it seems, to get

over it all so completely that she can bear to visit strangers at Anthony's old place, though Lady Rosamund is still in the house. But people are strange! And nine years is a long time in a woman's life. We never knew her, yet one hears talk. Still, there must be something good, or at least fascinating about Nina Desmond, to have made so sweet-natured a fellow as St. John de Grey her loyal friend. To hear him speak of her, one would have to believe she's near perfection."

"But you mustn't think for a minute he's in love with her, or ever was," Miss Peachy hastened to supplement her sister's words, with a look of warning for her elder twin. "Our friends who go to town a good deal, and know something of society, tell us that Nina Desmond has simply thrown herself at St. John's head for two or three years-indeed, ever since she began to go out after her husband's death; and that St. John had never seemed to realize what she meant. He's not a flirt, like too many young men, my dear, and until quite lately had been too taken up with his profession to think much about women—a true soldier, as he is. Indeed, he's had the reputation of being hard to capture; and I've no doubt that's why Nina Desmond singled him out for notice. She's a woman who, to be happy, must be supreme; one of those who can't rest easy while there's a man within reach who isn't in love with her."

"Peachy! I never heard you so sharp-tongued about anyone!" exclaimed Miss Poppy, surprised.

"Well," the little lady excused herself, blushing like a girl, "I don't want Dolores to do St. John an injustice. I want her to understand."

"I think I do understand," said Dolores quietly, her great eyes looking far away. She had regained her self-control now,

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and seemed almost unnaturally calm. As she spoke she rose, and thanked Miss Poppy and Miss Peachy for their kindness in telling her what she had wished very much to hear. "I'm afraid it has made you both sad to bring all this back," she said, "but—I'm very grateful; and I don't know what I should have done without your goodness. I couldn't have gone to anyone else, and I had to know."

Then, though they urged her to stay until she had recovered from the shock of hearing so sad a story, the girl said that she must go. There were things that she must do—and already it was late.

"You're sure you do understand about Captain de Grey?" were Miss Peachy's last words.

"Yes, I'm sure I understand," said Dolores, looking back with an odd, little smile.

"I do hope, dear, that you haven't done St. John any harm in that direction," sighed Miss Peachy to her sister when the girl had passed through the gate and out of sight. "It was here he met her first. And we've hoped for a romance ever since."

"The porch was hung with roses then; now the Virginia creeper has turned red," murmured Miss Poppy. "Spring and summer are for love-making; and there's something in that child's mind that's out of tune with all three."

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

WHEN A MAN'S IN LOVE

T did not matter to St. John de Grey that rose-time was over, when he saw Dolores Eliot coming down the green tunnel where he had first seen her sheltering from the rain. Her coming brought the summer back for him, and the very thought of her was sweet as the perfume of lilies and roses.

"Out so early!" he called from a distance, as Toddles rushed exuberantly to meet the girl. Then, as he drew near, the look on her face surprised and startled him. He saw that she was pale, and that there was something like terror in her eyes.

"Why, Miss Eliot, what has happened to distress you?" he asked abruptly, in a changed voice, his smile of greeting chilled to sudden gravity.

"Is my face such a tell-tale?" Dolores questioned anxiously, it seemed to St. John, though she tried to smile. "I'm sorry. Nothing has happened to me. But—I am sad. It doesn't go with this beautiful morning to be sad, and I feel out of place in the sunshine, so I'm hurrying home."

"That means that I mustn't keep you," he said. "But may Toddles and I turn round and walk with you part of the way till you tire of us? Don't say 'Yes,' if we'd bore you, and you'd rather be alone. Only—we'd like to come."

Dolores seemed to hesitate for a few seconds, and St. John

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thought that she was seeking an excuse to send him away without hurting his feelings; but if such a thought had come to her at first, she changed her mind.

"Yes, come with me," she said. "I shall be glad."

For a moment or two they walked side by side without speaking; then St. John broke the silence impulsively.

"I suppose I mustn't ask you any questions," he said, "but it makes me miserable to see you look like this. It makes me want to fight somebody; only I don't know 'whobody,' as I used to say when I was small. Shall it be anybody you've seen this morning?"

"I've seen only the Misses Greenleaf," said Dolores. "I wanted them to help me about something, and they did."

"I wish it had been I!" exclaimed De Grey. "Isn't there anything left for me to do?"

"I don't know," Dolores said. "Perhaps. I was thinking about you when I saw you coming."

"Really and truly? Were you feeling sorry for me?"

"Why should I?" the girl wanted to know.

"Because—well, if you weren't—that's a good sign. For if you had done a certain thing last night—a thing somebody almost made me believe you had done—you would have been sorry for me, I think; because you have a kind heart."

"I wonder what you mean?" Dolores said.

"Oh, I haven't got any right to talk to you like this; but I didn't sleep much last night, and I suppose I'm rather out of form this morning. I thought a walk would be the best thing for Toddles and me. Toddles is always sympathetic, poor chap, and off his feed if I am; so I tubbed about six, dressed myself, and came out."

- "Exactly what I did!" exclaimed Dolores. "But what did you fancy I did last night which ought to have made me sorry for you?"
- "Well—if you won't think me a beast for blurting it out like this, I thought—maybe you'd promised another man that you—now I see by your face you do know what I mean! Forgive me."
- "Yes, I suppose I know what you mean," the girl admitted.

 "And I do forgive you. I didn't do the thing you think, and
 I never will."
 - "Honestly? Then you don't lo-"
 - "No, of course not. Did I act as if I did?"
- "You didn't. But a man can never tell about girls, and La-"
 - "Don't stop. Go on."
 - "I can't. It would be caddish." St. John's face was red.
- "I believe I've guessed. Lady Desmond said something about it. I do think I have a right to know what."
- "By Jove! Fancy you're spotting it like that—as if you were clairvoyant. She only said that you—that he— No, I'd better stop there."
 - "I know. She said I'd marry him if he asked me."
- "There wasn't any question about his asking. That went without saying. But you see, she and I are rather pals. She's an awfully good friend, and she didn't want me to play the moth, when I should get nothing for it except burned wings. This shows even a woman can be mistaken about another woman. Miss Eliot, is there any possible chance for me?"
- "I like you very, very much," answered Dolores. "But I don't love you."

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- "Well," said St. John, "I didn't dare to hope. That settles it. I shan't bother you about it. And I oughtn't to have——"
 - "It doesn't settle it," Dolores said. "Unless you choose."
 - "You—you mean—"
- "I mean that I want to ask you something—more than one thing—before I give you any answer. Would you care about marrying me if I could only like and not love you?"
- "If I could make you happy—yes," St. John answered eagerly. "I love you so much, I'd trust to luck to make you love me back again in time—if you'd give me the blessed chance to try. Will you?"
- "I don't know yet. I haven't asked you all the things I have to ask. Suppose I said Yes, not just to please you, but to gain something for myself that wasn't connected with you at all, would you still want me?"
- "I wouldn't let you marry me because you'd quarreled with some other man, and wanted to take revenge on him," St. John answered bluntly. "As far as I'm concerned, I would. I'd take you anyhow, and be thankful. But that way wouldn't be fair to you, because you'd regret it afterwards, and I couldn't stand that."
- "It wouldn't be for any such reason," said Dolores, "if I promised to—to be engaged to you. But—I wouldn't want to tell you what the reason really was."
 - "Perhaps it would be a woman's reason; 'just because!'"
- "Perhaps. Would you want to be engaged to me—for a woman's reason?"
- "Yes. For any reason, except the one I said. Will you, darling? I can't tell you how much I love you. It's a good deal beyond words."

- "If I said Yes now, would you risk my having to break it off later?"
- "I would. Because I'd try so hard meanwhile to make you willing to keep on."
- "If I broke with you, it wouldn't be because I found out that I couldn't love you. I know now just how much I could love you. Enough to make you happy, I think."
 - "Would it be enough to make you happy?"
- "I'm not thinking about that. If I broke with you, it would be because of a woman."
- "Oh, in that case, I'll risk anything!" cried St. John. "And I bless my lucky stars that I thought of taking a walk this morning. Darling, you've pulled me out of the depths and set me on the heights."
 - "I'm not sure that I am not very wicked," said Dolores.
- "I'm sure that you are a white angel," retorted De Grey. "May I come in with you and talk with Mrs. Eliot?"
- "No—no!" cried the girl. "We're not even engaged. We may never be. It's only this: that you've asked me to marry you, and I haven't said No. Please don't be too happy. But please don't hate me."
- "There's not much danger of the last," said St. John.

 "As for the first—"
- "You must wait!" interjected Dolores. And when he would have kissed her hand—since her lips were not yet for him—she broke from him and ran through the half open gate of Queen's Quadrangles.

Tempted to follow, he resisted, and stood still, looking after the flying white figure. He had said that there was not much danger of his hating her. Now he began to feel that neither was there much danger of his being too happy.

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She was in a strange mood, a mood which he could not understand at all, and he told himself that perhaps he had taken undue advantage of it.

Certainly something queer had happened to her since they had parted after the ball last night, though even then she had seemed less happy than excited. Whatever the queer thing was, St. John realized that he had it to thank for the girl's half acceptance of his love. He did not know whether to consider that she was engaged to him or not; but he did know that she had seemed to need help; and he said to himself that, if it would help her to break his heart, he would wish to have her break it.

"She shall do what she likes with me," he said to himself.
"I am hers, even if she never should be mine."

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

LADY ROSAMUND

RANCES ELIOT had just finished breakfast, which had been brought to her bedroom, when Dolores knocked at the door and was let in by Parker.

The first glance at her mother's face told the girl that nothing disturbing had happened yet. Frances was happy in the success of the ball; and thinking anxiously how she was to begin the subject which must soon be broached, Dolores was led into gentle talk of last night's triumphs; what Lady Chilingworth had said; what compliments the duke had paid; how good it was of him to come; and they had only got as far as Lady Desmond's dress when Parker appeared at the door of the adjoining boudoir. She had been sent away ostensibly to mend a lace flounce, and now she announced a message from Lady Rosamund, brought by Soames.

Dolores's heart leaped lest the dreaded moment had come before she had been able to prepare her mother. But to her surprise and relief Lady Rosamund asked to see her, not Mrs. Eliot.

Her ladyship, said Soames, was waiting to speak with Miss Eliot at the door of Miss Eliot's own room; and this news surprised Dolores. It was strange that, after the terrible scene of last night, the woman who had ordered her to leave the house should come seeking her. It was as if Lady Rosamund purposely humbled herself; yet that could hardly

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be her meaning, the girl thought; and glad as she was of this chance, she dreaded the words she might have to hear, the look of anger she might have to meet.

Her first sight of the beautiful worn face, however, told her that a few hours had worked a great change in Lady Rosamund's mind.

"I want you to forgive me," were the first words the elder woman spoke.

Such an unexpected beginning was almost more startling than an attack, and Dolores's blood rushed to her face as if Lady Rosamund had struck her on the cheek.

"Please come into my room—if you don't mind," she said, opening the door with a hand that trembled a little.

"I would not mind crawling in on my knees," the other answered, "if that could make you forget what I did and said last night."

"If you wish me to forget, then, there is nothing to forgive," Dolores answered, when Lady Rosamund had passed into the room, with a drooping step. As the girl glanced at the white, bowed head of the graceful woman who trailed wearily in, she said to herself with a pang of fear that Lady Rosamund looked old, very old. What had happened in the night to age and break her thus? Could he be ill, or—Dolores shrank in anguish from finishing the thought.

"You don't say that you can forget?" the pale woman said.

"How can I forget?" asked the girl. "It was as if you branded me with redhot iron. But what does it matter whether I forget or not? There's only one thing of importance now. His safety."

Lady Rosamund started, and once more lightning blazed

from the dark, weary eyes. "Why should he not be safe—unless you have betrayed him? But, oh, forgive me again! I know you have not."

"You look as if you had suffered since you—saw me in the corridor," said Dolores, speaking bravely. "That's why I asked such a question."

"He's as safe as he has ever been—physically," Lady Rosamund answered. "But he knows what I did to you. If you could have seen his face when I told him, you would not want me punished in any other way. He has given me the whole history of your friendship with him, beginning at the first meeting. I know now how cruelly unjust I was to you last night."

"Is it only that which has changed you so since then?" cried the girl in surprise.

"No. It's more than that—much more; though I am sorry enough, as sorry as you can wish me to be, I think. But I have suffered for him, and because I have made him suffer. Never have I seen him look as he did when I went to him, and broke out in a fury against you—against what I thought your treachery. Once he might have been swept with a tempest of anger, but he has passed beyond that stage, as he has passed beyond his first youth. What I saw in his eyes last night was harder to bear than his anger would have been in the old days when it used to come and go like a flame. He didn't reproach me, yet I know that he will never feel the same again, unless you forgive me and go back to him."

"But—he doesn't want me to come again," said the girl.

[&]quot;He wants you more than he wants anything else. You are the only thing that he does want."

"He said last night that it would be better for us not to meet any more; and he bade me good-by."

"He said that? Then it was because— Ah, I think I understand. But I implore you not to take him at his word. He lived without you, before he knew what it was to have you in his life—if you can call it life. Yet now, I believe he will not be able to go on living if he is to lose you. The one interest he has would be gone. Ah, you see how I humble myself to tell you this. You see how little I am to him, compared with you. But instead of trying to keep you from him, I'll kneel to you if it will give you satisfaction—and if it needs that to make you grant my request."

"Oh, it doesn't!" cried the girl, ashamed to witness this proud woman's humiliation. "I would gladly go back—oh, so gladly, if he himself hadn't told me not to come. And you know you said last night that mother and I must leave this house to-day—"

"Must you remind me of that? I've begged you to forget."

"But I'd made up my mind what to say to mother, so that she mightn't think it too strange. I wanted her to pay you the rent for two years, just the same, and—"

"You wanted that, in spite of the way I treated you? That was very noble, and I thank you. But I couldn't have taken the money, if things had been as I thought they were last night. I would even have tried to pay your mother back all she's spent upon the place, though it would have taken a long time—unless I sold all the pictures and china. I have sold many things before now."

"I thought perhaps you had, when we came," said Dolores, "for there were empty places where old furniture or portraits should have been; and it made me so sorry. But now

I know why you did it. It was for him. And for his sake, not your own, I should have made you accept the money—the money you wanted so much that you were ready to take strangers into your home."

- "Do you know what he is to me?" asked Lady Rosamund, in a low, broken voice.
 - "I think—he is your son Anthony."
 - "He told you?"
- "No, he has told me nothing about himself. But this morning I heard the story of your son, and—oh, be sure I didn't hear it from an enemy! I wouldn't have listened. It was told me by some one who loved him well—some one who speaks and thinks of him as dead. But I guessed the truth. And I know, of course, that he was innocent."
- "I know that too, though he has never told me how Elinor Vane died. I have only guessed. And you have guessed too——"
- "I guessed that you saved him, and that his whole life has been vowed to you since. Don't look frightened, Lady Rosamund. I would be burned at the stake rather than tell anyone but you what is in my thoughts about him. You were glorious—wonderful—to do what you must have done. And even if you hated me as you did last night I should still love you for that."
- "I am his mother," whispered Lady Rosamund. "What mother wouldn't have done the same? But since you know—since I think you understand now, and forgive, you won't leave this house? Stay and help me to make his existence bearable. He has seemed so much brighter, so different these last few weeks, just as I had begun to despair, watching his slow agony, and almost wishing, for his sake, that I had let

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him die. Oh, I know I am selfish in asking such a sacrifice of you—in trying to chain you to the same prison in which I am bound. But he's my life."

"I would rather stay and help you in that way than anything else in the world," said Dolores. "But how can I, since he doesn't want to see me again?"

"I tell you he does want you—and nothing but you," repeated Lady Rosamund, almost fiercely. "Don't you think I know? I believe that you've kept him from suicide. Sometimes he must have been terribly tempted; but his promise to me has held his hand; and then you came, a blessing from heaven. He called you that, when I went to him to accuse you."

"Yet often, night after night, he has refused to have me with him," Dolores said. "All last week."

"Ah, that was my fault. Perhaps it has always been my fault," pleaded the elder woman. "Last week was a terrible anniversary. Nine years ago at that time he was to have died a criminal's death. While that week in October is passing, I can never rest; and it was more than ever dreadful this year. When the house was empty, save for myself and the two old servants who have shared the secret with me, Anthony was able to come out of his prison sometimes. Since you have been here, he and I have had to be more separated; though I took the priest's room and the steward's room for mine so that we might reach each other easily. During that awful anniversary week I can never rest, for I live through it all again, each year. Time can't dim the vividness of such memories. Usually we have our meetings before ten o'clock at night; and his custom used to be to take an hour or two of exercise on the lake or in the park afterwards. But when

I suffer from nervous headaches I go to him, or he comes to me, and his presence saves me from horrors inexpressible. I always know by day when it is likely to be bad beyond endurance, and then I go, or send word by Soames to say that I will meet him. Not a night last week that Anthony was not bathing my head or soothing me with dear and gentle words, till nearly morning. Strange, that it should be he who helps me by his strength, and not I him. But so it is. There was never anyone like Anthony. These stony years of misery, instead of driving him to madness or desperation, have made of him a hero and a saint."

"Now I begin to understand why he has never tried to escape to some other country, where he might live in freedom in disguise, under another name," said Dolores.

"You think he stayed here for my sake? Yes, that is true. He knew I couldn't exist without him; and he knew, too, that though he might possibly have got away safely, if he went alone, he couldn't have taken me. Together, we could not have kept the secret, if we had left this house, which was made for the keeping of secrets. He wouldn't subject me to the misery of leading a hunted life, each hour in danger of discovery. Think, if we had been taken, and had been forced to go through all that horror again! I couldn't have saved him a second time. It would have been a hundred deaths in one for me. And, besides, if Anthony had tried to live by his painting, as he must have done if abroad, it would almost surely have led to detection. Here, I've contrived an existence, and torn a wretched living of a sort out of the estate which Anthony made mine. But at last, because there was no money to spend on repairs, the place was going to ruin. I had to advertise for tenants-and I thought, if I made the condition

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that I should be housekeeper, and the two old servants should be kept on, there would be no danger for Anthony, in the lost court. He would still be able to go out at night; I could visit him, and he could come to me if I took the steward's room. I didn't tell him at first that we were to have strangers in the house, for I knew he would hate the idea—yet money was so necessary! It was only when everything was settled that I confessed; and he didn't blame me. He never does, for anything I do—my poor boy! But I could see how he detested the thought; and afterwards I wondered at finding him more cheerful than he had ever been since his martyrdom began."

"Didn't he want you to save him from death?" Dolores asked.

"No, I forgot that I hadn't made you understand that. When he had been condemned to die, I got permission to see him for a few minutes alone. They searched me first, of course, and satisfied themselves that I could do nothing to hinder the crime they called justice. But in my mouth I carried a tiny sealed tube of glass, just big enough to hold half a dozen drops of a dark red liquid. Many years ago this tube had been given me, in India, when I was a girl, and my father was viceroy. It had been made a present to me by the favorite of a rajah, and she had had it from her mother. 'There is three days' sleep in those six ruby drops,' she said. Then she went on to tell me that one who drank would seem to be dead; no beating of the heart; no film on a mirror held over the mouth. Even if buried, provided the grave were opened within seventy hours, the sleeper would be found alive. And the ranee gave me her treasure because my father's influence had restored to the rajah a great province which he

had lost. It was the thing that she valued most; and though it did not seem then that it could ever be of use to me, I kept it always. It was as if some prophetic spirit had whispered in my ear the awful need I would have of it one day.

"I gave the tube to Anthony, but I deceived him, and said there was death in it—a better death than the shameful one appointed. He was glad, and thanked me, for brave as he was, the thought of such a disgraceful end had been a horror to him—more for my sake than his own, I think.

"It was agreed between us that he should hide the tube as I had hidden it—in his mouth—and break the seal that night, so that he might appear to have died in his sleep. But I know if I had told him the truth, he wouldn't have consented to take the stuff. He wanted to die, and even for me he could not have accepted life at such a price as he has paid, year after year. I was saving him in spite of himself. But I couldn't be sure that I was saving him. How could I tell that the red drops in the tube hadn't lost their virtue, or that the ranee had made a mistake and the stuff was poison?

"There was that risk to run. But even if it were poison, it would be better that Anthony should die of it than be given to the hangman. Oh, it was a thousand times worth risking! Yet the suspense I suffered during the next three days all but drove me to madness. At night, I dream of it now—often; especially at this time of year, which I always dread.

"You heard the story, how Anthony died in his cell? There was great sympathy for me, and I had some influence in high places, so I was allowed to have my son's body. In its coffin they smuggled it out of the prison at night, and I brought it home; I, and old Soames, who loved him. He was in the secret, and he and I had got ready the lost court, making

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it habitable, in case all should go well, and Anthony should live.

"It was in the lost court that he waked up; and at first he could hardly forgive me for what I had done. If he had not known that it would kill me, he would have destroyed himself. In his despair he said things terrible for me to hear, called me more cruel than the hangman who would have put him out of misery. But when I broke down utterly, he repented and begged my forgiveness. Since then, he has never lost his self-control; yet knowing what a fire must rage in his heart, it has nearly broken mine to see him so calm outwardly.

"For my sake he has gone on living, through the blank days and nights that made the years, till you came. Since then, the days and nights have not been blank. He has had an interest. I know very well why he kept that interest a secret, never telling me that you had come into his life. He thought I would be jealous. And he was right. I am jealous. But my love is greater than my jealousy—greater than he has ever dreamed yet. Above all, I want his happiness—such poor happiness as he can have. If he has told you not to come to him again, it is because he thinks it is not fair to you. Don't take him at his word. I promise you that he'll be glad to have you back—glad as a man lost in a desert is at sight of an oasis."

"Then I will go to him, since you bid me," said Dolores. "It made me miserable to be sent away—first by him, then by you. I tried to get to him last night, because there was something I wanted to say—for his own sake. This morning, I hoped that I might send word by you, since I was never to see him again. But after all—I will wait—"

"Yes, wait till you see him yourself," broke in Lady Rosamund eagerly. "There's another door into the lost court that you don't know, perhaps, leading out of the priest's wardrobe. When the place was made, there had to be plenty of ways into the court, lest one or another should be impossible at any time. But I always keep the priest's wardrobe locked. Anthony could never let you out through that room, but I can let you in; and it's the only safe way by daylight, when there may be servants about. Come with me now. I'll take you to him."

Dolores hesitated. And before she could answer, a clock on the mantel began to strike. It struck twelve; and at any moment Lady Desmond might arrive.

The girl had meant to give Lady Rosamund some warning of danger; but she had a different idea now. This pale woman had suffered too much. Unless there was pressing need, Anthony's mother must be spared further pain, and a vague plan was shaping itself in the girl's mind. She meant to fight with Nina Desmond for Anthony's safety, and she was going to fight alone.

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A WOMAN'S BATTLE

ADY DESMOND was prompt. It was scarcely five minutes past twelve when she arrived at Queen's Quadrangles, on foot, and sent

word that she wished to see Miss Eliot.

Dolores found her sitting in the small white drawing-room, and as she rose—a tall figure in black, with a drooping hat that shadowed her face-she was like some modern French artist's conception of Fate.

The girl had never seen her in black before, and instinctively she felt that the dress had been worn for a purpose. Nina had wished to impress and overawe her.

A little while ago no such suspicion would have come to her mind. But now she seemed to know things about the elder woman without being told. It was as if a master key to Lady Desmond's intricate nature had been put into her hand and she had been taught how to use it. She had been afraid of Nina last night, but she was not afraid of her now.

There were no conventional greetings between them. After one glance at the girl's grave face, Lady Desmond went straight to the business on which she had come.

"Where can we talk without danger of being overheard or interrupted?" she asked. "It's not safe here."

"Let us go out of doors, then," Dolores suggested. "You make me feel as if I needed sunshine and open air."

"That doesn't sound like a compliment," said Nina, with a dry laugh.

"It is not one," Dolores answered. "You didn't come here, dressed as if in mourning, to hear compliments, did you?"

"I wore black because colors seemed to jar, when I thought of the things we might have to say to each other," explained Lady Desmond, giving the girl a sharp glance. "I can tell you, I'm in no gay mood. And you—you have a strange manner, and a strange look. I hardly know you this morning."

"Yet I seem to know you better than I ever did before," said Dolores. "Shall we go outside? There's a summer-house just on the borders of the park, if you don't mind five minutes' walk. No one ever comes there, and we can talk safely."

"As you like," answered Nina, shrugging her shoulders. And in silence they crossed the lawns together, Lady Desmond trailing her black dress over the close-clipped grass. Each was wondering how best to begin her part in the battle which both foresaw; and so, without having spoken once, they came to the old summerhouse where Dolores had imprisoned the spaniel puppy.

It was a curious little Georgian "temple" of meretricious architecture, and the girl flung all the windows wide open.

"What toys are these?" Nina asked sharply, looking at the battered rocking-horse, and the wooden soldiers huddled into a corner by their broken fort.

"I think perhaps they were Anthony Vane-Eliot's," returned Dolores, speaking the name without faltering.

"Oh! You know a great deal about him."

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- "I've heard his story."
- "You refused to hear it from me."
- "I didn't even know then whose story you were trying to tell. But I wouldn't listen because I knew that, whoever it was, you were his enemy. Won't you sit down? See, I've dusted this seat with my handkerchief."
 - "No!" ejaculated Nina, shortly. "I can't sit here. I hate this place."
 - "You hate it because you think Anthony Vane-Eliot used to play here," said Dolores. "And you feel as if he were near now. With his old playthings scattered round you, it may be hard to say what you want to say to me."
 - "How do you know what I want to say?" Lady Desmond asked, her eyes dilating.
 - "I know you want to tell me things about him which are not true, and you would rather tell them somewhere else."
 - "You are very impertinent—very insulting—yet I came to see you as your friend." The color mounted slowly to Lady Desmond's face, under the pearly film of liquid powder.
 - "I should perhaps have believed that a few days ago," said the girl, "but not now. One has revelations sometimes. Please begin with what you wish to say, because there's no other place as safe as this for us to talk without being disturbed. And after all, those poor toys aren't ghosts, are they?"
 - "One thing I have to talk of is a ghost," Nina caught Dolores up, still refusing to sit down. "Tillingbourne told me about the ghost he saw in the library, you know. And he said you saw it too."

The girl did not answer, but stood waiting, very quiet and grave. When Lady Desmond saw that her face did not

change, and that she did not flinch at all, she went on, less aggressively.

"Tillingbourne believes in ghosts; I don't. And I don't

think you do?"

Still Dolores was silent.

"He said you went into the library to meet some one, and he followed you. Then the ghost appeared. . . . One puts two and two together—and they usually make four. There was that miniature you wore round your neck. Probably you're wearing it now. You said you 'found' it—and I don't doubt your word, though you doubted mine. If one's had a certain bringing up, one doesn't like to be rude. But there are various ways of 'finding' things. If I told Tilling-bourne about the miniature even he might begin to doubt the ghost theory, although he knows less of the history of this house—and the character of Lady Rosamund Vane-Eliot—than I do."

"I thought you didn't know Lady Rosamund," said Dolores.

"I know as much about her as if we'd been intimate friends—or enemies. As for our meetings—we've never exchanged a word. But we have heard each other's voices—and in a place and circumstances which fix the slightest details in one's memory. It was during the trial of Lady Rosamund's son Anthony for the murder of my cousin Elinor, my brother Paul's wife. We were both called as witnesses—she and I."

"You were against him," said Dolores.

Nina Desmond threw her a strange look. "I was neither for nor against. I spoke what I had seen and heard," she answered.

·THE HUVSE of THE LOST COVET.

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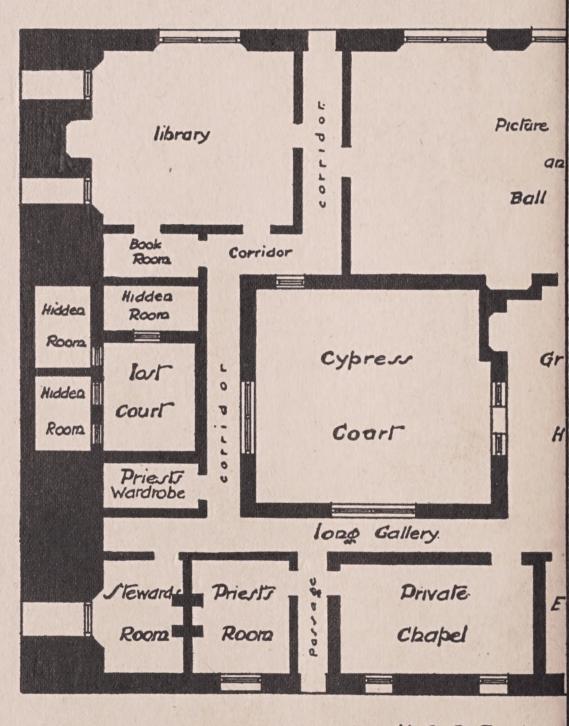
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Dolores made no comment. But she was looking straight into the other's eyes; and her hand, as if absentmindedly, fell on the head of the battered war-horse with which Anthony Vane-Eliot had played when a child.

"Who told you that I was against him?" Lady Desmond asked angrily.

"No one," the girl answered.

Nina gave an impatient exclamation. "You choose to be enigmatic this morning," she said. "All this is beside the point. I came here to say certain things, and it will be better for you and everyone concerned that I say them without these stupid delays—for I have to go back to town this afternoon. I have my own interests in life, you must remember; and I came to serve yours. The sooner we finish the better. I'm sorry that you don't treat me as a friend, but it's your affair, not mine, if you're ungrateful. To go back to the miniature—and the ghost."

"Yes, let us go back to them," said the girl.

"And to Lady Rosamund," added Nina. "I don't believe in too many coincidences, any more than I believe in ghosts. And thanks to you, with your miniature and your confused tale about it—thanks to Tillingbourne and his ghost story, I suspected—no, I knew by a flash of intuition, a thing which I might have guessed long ago. Anthony Vane-Eliot is not dead. Somehow—I don't know how—but there might have been a dozen ways—Lady Rosamund saved him. Why, a clever and all-loving woman who fears nothing for herself can outwit any man! I could have saved him myself, if I'd loved him as she did."

"Instead, because you hated him, you condemned him to death," said Dolores.

Lady Desmond's eyes blazed, and a pulse began to beat in her white throat. "How dare you?" she cried. "You had better take care, if there's anyone you wish to save."

"Please go on," the girl prompted her.

"I will go on. And it's very fortunate for you that I'm not revengeful. I am certain that Anthony Vane-Eliot was smuggled alive out of his prison two days before the punishment he should have suffered. I believe that by his mother's help he escaped to some other country in disguise, while everyone supposed him dead! that now he has come back, and that you and he have met. He has been in this house. He gave you that miniature of himself. He was at the dance last night. Perhaps you were thoughtful enough to arrange that there should be fancy dress, so that he might come without fear of discovery. Because you're an inexperienced, impressionable young girl he's found it easy to make you believe in him and his innocence. If Tillingbourne hadn't told me his ghost story I might not have been able to save you from the plot which I'm sure Anthony and his mother have concocted together. If they hadn't between them got to the end of their resources, Lady Rosamund would never have let this house to strangers. But then, nobody except strangers would have taken it! Don't you see, you've been a pawn in their game? Perhaps you think that a man like Anthony Vane-Eliot-thirty-four, blasé, tired of love and passion-would be caught like a boy, by your beaux-yeux? You've forgotten that you're an heiress. What more natural than that Lady Rosamund should call her son out of hiding to angle for such a tempting goldfish? You told me yourself that your mother knew nothing of the miniature or its original, and you begged me to keep your secret, lest she should think you 'silly and romantic.' What wildly inadequate words—if I'd only known then! But it's your 'silly romance' those two have traded on—the man and the woman. Look me in the eyes if you can and say that you haven't promised Anthony Vane-Eliot to run away with him?"

"You're not as clever as I thought you were, Lady Desmond," said Dolores, very pale, but with eyes luminous as stars. "In not one single guess have you touched the truth."

"You fight for your hand—and your lover, more like a woman than a young girl," answered Nina contemptuously. "A few minutes ago you told me I lied—or as nearly as you dared. Now I tell you that I don't believe what you say. You have an American game called poker, haven't you, in which the trick is to 'bluff'; but it's useless to try that trick with me. I'm not angry with you, as I might be. I pity you. And I'm going to snatch you from the most ghastly fate that could befall a woman—marriage with an escaped criminal who must hide always under a false name, and in some land far from his own; a man without a country, a man who would give you a hand red still with the blood of the only woman he ever really loved."

"What are you going to do?" asked Dolores, still very quiet, though her lips trembled as they formed the question.

"I'm going to tell the police that the murderer is alive, and either in this house or near it."

"You've no proof-only your own suspicions," said the

pale girl.

"I have enough proof to set the police on his track and they'll do all the rest. You can save him only by putting yourself in my hands. And to show you that I'm merciful —that I've no personal enmity against Lady Rosamund or

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her son, no wish to bring further disgrace on a name which was once mine and is still my brother's—I'll be silent and give the man time to escape again, if you do exactly as I tell you. My only motive, I assure you, Dolores, is to pull you out of the fire into which you were ready to throw yourself—to spare your mother grief and shame unspeakable."

"I'm waiting to hear the plan you have to propose," Dolores said, in the gentle, controlled voice which was not quite steady.

"Tell Tillingbourne to-day that you'll marry him; and then let him get a special license. I'll guarantee that he shall suggest that; for his dearest wish is to have you for his, to make sure of you as soon as possible."

"For my 'beaux-yeux,'" quoted Dolores bitterly, "or because I'm a goldfish?"

"Oh, Tillingbourne is an impetuous boy. He's fallen head over ears in love with you—you must know that! He mayn't be rich, as men in his position go, but he isn't so broken in pocket as to be a fortune-hunter like others. Heiresses greater than you, girls of the best families in England, would thank Heaven for him."

"While a little nobody from America like me might be too stupid to appreciate the blessing. I know you think me very silly and unsophisticated, Lady Desmond, and so I was a few weeks ago. But I've changed lately—partly under your influence."

"Then let me exert that influence upon you now for your own good."

"I've outgrown it. And I know that you're not disinterested. As you said about me, you're fighting for your own hand."

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"What do you mean? What possible motive could I have in trying to persuade you to marry Tillingbourne, except friendship for him, a kindness for you that's hardly deserved —and a wish to save you from a tragic fate?"

"You could have the wish to marry me in a hurry to a man who is nothing to you, for fear I might marry one whom you love and want yourself."

A wave of blood swept over Nina Desmond's face. "You're intolerable—unspeakable!" she stammered. "And I don't understand what it is you insinuate. I understand only that you're insulting."

"It's very likely that I may marry Captain de Grey," said Dolores.

Nina started as if she had been struck by a whip.

"He has never asked you. He never will!" she panted.

"He asked me this morning," returned the girl. "And I answered neither yes nor no, because I thought that you and I should have this talk, and I wanted to wait till afterwards."

"People say you are like an angel, but really you are a devil," said Nina.

"I don't think I am that," Dolores defended herself almost doubtingly, "but I had to fight you with your own weapons. I'm only a girl, and you are a woman, but I knew you'd have no mercy on me. I strengthened myself as well as I could."

"Poor St. John!" sneered Lady Desmond. "So you've made him a cat's-paw to drag your chestnuts out of the fire? He'll love you the better for that when he hears how clever you've been!"

"You can't do me any harm with him," Dolores warned

her. "I asked if he'd be willing to be only half engaged, and wait for me to make up my mind, and he said yes. I told him too that I didn't love him, but that if we were ever really engaged, I would try very hard to. And that was the truth. If I marry him, I'll do my best to make him happy so that he may never regret his loyalty and generosity, for he has been loyal and generous. And I shall tell him the whole truth before our wedding day—if that day is to come."

"Do you think he'd take you if he knew how you'd played fast and loose with him—for the sake of a murderer?" Nina Desmond flung at her.

"He won't call it playing fast and loose. There's no use arguing about this, Lady Desmond, because nothing you can do or say will keep Captain de Grey from marrying me if I tell him that I'm willing to be his wife."

"Why do you think I care whether you marry him or not?" cried Nina, in a voice shrill with the stab of her anguish.

"Because—if you make me say it—because you love him and want him to love you. I think you want that more than anything else in the world, though once, a little while ago, I shouldn't have dreamed of it, as he's so much younger than you."

Lady Desmond's eyes shone green, and she looked like a beautiful cat.

"Sweet innocent, to twit me with my age!" she hissed.

"I don't twit you," said Dolores. "I only say what is true. It doesn't matter. I don't suppose there are many years difference. And if there were it's nothing to me, for Captain de Grey loves me, not you. Only, if I refuse him,

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you'll have your chance with him still, won't you? Just the same chance you had when you were friends before he knew me."

"You believe I can't take him from you—a child like you!" Nina stammered, her hands clenched so that their nails cut into her palms through the soft suède gloves.

"I know you can't while I choose to keep him," the girl replied with that terrible simplicity which daunted the experienced woman. "I should be sorry to see him marry you, if I gave him up, because I know you're not worthy of him; but he's a man and can take care of himself. I shall do nothing to keep him from you, or prejudice him against you, if I do give him up. But I won't give him up unless you do the things I want you to do. I will marry him just as soon as he cares to take me."

"Your mother won't allow it," said Nina. "I've told her that he isn't free. That he compromised a married woman, and that by right he belongs to her—"

"Yes, I know. Mother repeated that story to me," Dolores admitted, "as much as she thought I ought to hear. But you see, it was after the night when you saw the miniature, and I understood you so much better then somehow. I felt you would do anything to obtain an object you had at heart. And when mother was telling me what you'd said about Captain de Grey, it came to me suddenly that you loved him and wanted to marry him yourself."

"You don't mince your words!" gasped Nina.

"No. It's better not, isn't it? We have to understand each other—and you said you were in a hurry because you had to go to town."

The girl's downrightness was appalling to Nina Desmond.

She saw this young creature, whom she had thought a doll to be played with, in a new light, and she feared the child she had intended to bend to her own purposes.

"Well," she said harshly, "what if I do love him? There's nothing to be ashamed of in that. It is coarse and unworthy to taunt me with it. You're not fitted to be his wife. He'd tire of you in six months."

"Perhaps," Dolores argued. "But we'll both risk that."

"If I promise to hold my tongue about Anthony Vane-Eliot, and let the world go on believing him to be dead, will you throw St. John over?" asked Nina, reluctant but helpless in the childish hands she had thought so weak.

"Not for a promise only, because you might break it."

I'm almost sure you would break it."

"Oh! You have other conditions?"

"One other. If you don't want me to marry Captain de Grey you will have to tell how your sister-in-law, Elinor Vane, really died."

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

NINA THINKS OF A PLAN

Dolores had offered to her in the summerhouse, but suddenly strength went out of her and she sat down weakly. She felt curiously tired, almost faint, and the blood drummed dully in her temples. "I didn't sleep last night," she said, moistening her lips. "I'm beginning to feel the effects now. I don't think I can have understood what you said. It's impossible——"

Dolores repeated her words. "You and Anthony himself were the only ones who knew the truth," she added.

"The truth!" faltered Nina. "Why, the truth was—what came out at his trial. He confessed. Didn't you hear that—when you heard the story you wouldn't let me tell?"

"Yes, I heard that. But it didn't make any difference to me for, of course, I knew he was innocent. He must have had a very strong reason for taking the guilt upon himself. I knew he was unselfish—so unselfish people called it a fault. But he had his mother to think of. And even if he didn't believe that he'd be condemned to death—not knowing at first what man would judge him, and almost tell the jury to convict—he must have known that he'd be sent to prison for life. And if there hadn't been some motive, he wouldn't have brought such sorrow on Lady Rosamund. That's why

I'm sure that he sacrificed himself either for your sake, or Mrs. Vane's. And you didn't tell what you knew, because you hated him and wanted him to die,"

"You make me out a monster!" cried Nina Desmond.

"I do think you were wicked—horribly wicked. I hope you've repented since, and if you have it will make it e sier to speak the real truth at last. People would respect you the more for telling it. They would believe you'd kept it back because of some promise to Anthony. While you thought him dead you were bound to keep a promise, but if you found out that he was still alive, your duty would be to exonerate him. You could explain your motives then and now, in such a way that no one who wasn't in the real secret would blame you for your part in the past. Oh, Lady Desmond, I'm not asking you to ruin your life and spoil your future."

"The real secret! What do you mean by that?' Nina caught at these words with fear in her eyes and voice.

"Why, there must have been a secret," Dolores as swered, still with that deadly simplicity and directness that fright-ened the older woman because they were new in her experience. "I've been thinking about it every minute since I heard the story, and wondering what it was. Of course, I realized at once that it was you who condemned Anthony, and I wondered what he could have done to make you hate him like that, for I knew you were supposed to love him once."

"I did love him," Nina said, with a kind of dogged defiance. "He was my first love. And if ever a wor an knew how to love, it is I. Do you still think that I swore his life away?"

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"Yes, I think it even more than before. You can hate as well as you can love. He didn't care for you, and he did care for your sister-in-law, Elinor. You didn't like her when you were girls together. It must have been terrible for you that she should have what you wanted more than you wanted an thing else. If you let Anthony see that you cared—told him, perhaps, for I think you'd be capable of that—and he was very sorry, but showed you there was no hope, it would be enough to make you hate him—a woman like you."

"Do you expect me to confess, with tears?" The question was a sneer, yet the woman was shaken. Dolores saw that, and hoped.

"Not to me. And I don't ask you to 'confess' to anyone. I only ask you to state things. There's all the difference in that."

Ning was silent for a moment, looking at the girl. Then she said, more quietly than she had spoken yet: "I should like to kill you. If I thought no one would ever know I had done it. I would kill you, Dolores Eliot."

"Ye, I suppose you would," said the girl. "Then you'd be quite safe, for I couldn't come between you and Captain de Grey, or make you do anything you didn't want to do. But I'm not afraid."

"You needn't be afraid, since everyone in the house knows I'm wit you, and at least two gardeners must have seen us come this way together. No, you needn't be afraid. But if you I we any red blood in your veins, aren't you sorry for me; Can't you have any sympathy? I'm not an ugly or unattractive woman, am I? Many men have loved me. But the only two I've ever cared for have loved other women. I can't give up St. John to you."

"I've told you that I'll give him up—whether to you or not, who knows?—but I'll give him up if you will tell how Mrs. Vane died. When you've told that, it won't matter who knows that Anthony's alive."

A curious, snaky look came into the gray-green eyes that slanted a little upward. "Very well, I'll tell you everything," Nina said, "provided you'll write a note to St. John while I'm with you, according to my dictation, and give it to me to send."

There was a warning of treachery in the eyes which once had fascinated the girl. But Dolores did not hesitate in answering.

- "Shall we go indoors, then?" she asked. "I must have paper and a pen and ink."
 - "You'll write the letter, then?"
 - "Yes, if you will do the same."
 - "What do you mean?"
 - "I mean, if you'll put your story on paper."
 - "What-you don't trust me?"
- "No," said Dolores. "I think unless I had it all in your own writing that afterwards you'd deny any statement you made in words."
- "You speak like some sharp, suspicious old solicitor, rather than a young girl!" exclaimed Nina.
- "Perhaps I inherit something from my father," said Dolores thoughtfully, as if she were wondering at herself. "I never knew I had it before; but now, when I need to be cautious to keep you from tricking me, things seem to come into my mind as if a voice were speaking there. It may be my father's voice."

The snaky light was gone from Nina's eyes, and they were

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

dull with disappointment. She had meant to deceive the girl, but she saw herself outwitted so far.

"Shall we go into the house?" Dolores asked again. "We've finished our talk and said all we have to say, haven't we? So it's only left for us to write."

"Wait a minute. I want to think," said Nina. And the girl sat still, looking at her with a clear gaze that seemed to see into her mind, following its workings.

Lady Desmond felt that she could not bear her life if Dolores Eliot married St. John de Grey. Not to marry him herself, or at least to win him for her lover, would be terrible, but to see him the husband of another woman would be unendurable.

Once before she had gone through such an experience. She had made every effort a woman can make, and some which no woman can afford to make, in the hope of capturing her cousin, Anthony Vane-Eliot. She had failed; and the girl, who had always been her rival, always stood in her way, had secured him, only to jilt him later. Then she had hoped again, for the hearts of some men can be caught in the rebound; but she had not caught Anthony's. It had already been cold to her, and she, who had power over others, had none over him.

Through Anthony she had suffered such humiliation as she could not recall without tingling in every vein; and his supposed death had not appeased her. Now, having leaped to the conclusion that a gigantic fraud had been perpetrated on the world, all the old desire to hurt him, to revenge herself, came back, and until this child Dolores Eliot had cast a net round her, she had thought that she saw her way to do both.

She had been glad when she heard that he was dead in prison, for death insured his silence. While he lived, she had feared that he might change his mind and save his neck by telling the real story of Elinor's last moments. Besides, though she had wanted him to die, an execution was a disgrace to all those connected with him.

Now, however, it seemed to her that she had vaguely suspected from the beginning. The thought of Anthony alive and a fugitive did not strike her as amazing, incredible—and if through her he should be taken and dealt with for the second time by the law, she was not afraid, as she had once been, of what he might tell. His story would have been believed at first. It would not be believed now, if his testimony were unsupported by hers. The world would think that in desperation he had concocted a wild tale to save himself at any cost.

She had not intended her part in unearthing his secret to come out. She would have written an anonymous letter to Scotland Yard, marshaling her facts so circumstantially that even a nameless communication must have created an impression. As Anthony would almost certainly kill himself rather than be retaken, the interests of his heir—her brother—would not be jeopardized. Altogether, she had felt safe in threatening Dolores Eliot, and in carrying out the threat. Also, it had been in her mind that, after she had got the girl out of the way by marrying her to Lord Tillingbourne, the anonymous letter might still be written. Even Dolores could never be sure then how Anthony had been betrayed. But now—all was changed, and she did not know what would be best for her to do.

Only one thing was certain. She could not go through

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

with St. John what she had gone through with Anthony. She loved St. John even more than she had ever loved the other, she thought, for she was older now and knew to the full what love was. Because she was older she had less resilience, less power of recuperation after a blow. She could never learn to hate St. John as she had hated Anthony after her humiliation by him. Nothing that St. John could do, she felt, could make her love him less.

Once she had brought herself to hate Anthony Vane-Eliot, everything had been easy enough. She had enjoyed finding ways of hurting him, of doing him harm. She had often been able to torture him through Elinor, and through Paul, whom he had so loved. Then, the last coup of all had been her greatest triumph. She had worked up to it, perhaps, but only half consciously, not guessing in what manner it was destined to come. And the end had been inspiration, neither more nor less.

In one moment she had gained a revenge which repaid her for years of torture, and never had she regretted what she had done then, for the tragic publicity of the affair had not hurt her prestige. She had been already established as a beauty and a popular favorite in the only set that mattered, and so she had become a heroine rather than an outcast from society. Then she had shortly after married a rich man, and the old scandal in the Vane family had ceased eventually to be associated with her name. Now, she was afraid of no one's opinion—no one's, except St. John de Grey's; and his was everything.

What could she do to propitiate this terrible girl, and at the same time keep St. John's friendship so intact that later it might turn to love?

The problem could not be thought out in a moment; but Dolores was patient, with a patience which to Nina Desmond's desperation seemed utterly devoid of mercy.

If she did the thing that Dolores asked of her—if she wrote the letter which would establish Anthony's innocence, could she word it in such a way as to protect herself?

Hastily she reviewed the evidence she had given at the trial, so far as she could recall it after more than nine years.

Fortunately she had been ill, and had been spared as much as possible by everyone. Her cross-examination had not been severe. Most of her answers had been monosyllables; "Yes," or "No." Of course, if she wrote now, she need not tell all the truth. She would not be obliged to say how by that wonderful inspiration of hers—she had incited Anthony to the course he had chosen to take. No one need ever know that if it had not been for her promptings he would probably have told the whole truth, bluntly, when Paul came into the room and found his wife dying. All that she must confess would be a loyalty, mistaken perhaps, which had led her to bear out Anthony's own version of Elinor's death.

As she meditated, sentences began to form themselves in Nina's mind. She could be eloquent on paper, as she knew well, though there was one notable instance when that eloquence had failed. Once she had written to Anthony, after a scene between them which he had misunderstood, and told him in words how she loved him—loved him as no other woman could love. And he had replied gently, kindly, that she was and always would be his dear cousin. He could not believe that she really thought of him in any other way. After that answer she had begun to hate him, and had hated

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him more every day that passed, until he was dead—as she supposed—and the shame he had put upon her forgotten.

That was her only failure, and she put it out of her head now, as she thought of the letter she might write. Yes, such a letter would do her more good than harm, she told herself—and as for Anthony, he might not live long to trouble her peace, after all.

In writing, she would admit that she now knew him to be still alive; that she had just heard of his existence. But after Dolores had given the promised note for St. John de Grey, and it had been safely delivered, she could secretly tell the police that Anthony Vane-Eliot was hiding in the neighborhood—perhaps even at Queen's Quadrangles. Once such a letter as she meant Dolores to write was in St. John's hands, he would not want to marry the girl, even if Dolores tried to win him back. Therefore, if Anthony Vane-Eliot were found, and should kill himself while ignorant that his innocence could be proved, Dolores would be unable to do her any harm. She could not be certain that Lady Desmond had betrayed Anthony. Tillingbourne might have done that, or some one else who had recognized him on the night of the ball.

This was an exciting thought to Nina, for she hated Dolores Eliot now almost as much as she hated Anthony. She had come to Queen's Quadrangles at St. John's request, prepared to dislike and be jealous of the American girl whom he wanted her to meet. From the first she had intended to separate them, instead of helping to bring them together as St. John expected, and she had done everything in her power to further that result without allowing St. John to suspect treachery. But to-day was the climax. She felt an

Anthony after his letter to her long ago. Nina Desmond told herself that if she could part the girl from St. John, and by the same stroke destroy the man Dolores fought for, while pretending to save him, she would have only one thing for which to wish—St. John's love. That might be difficult to win, but with the American girl out of the way, she believed that she could win it.

Her face cleared as she finished this chain of argument, and she rose, drawing a long breath. "Yes, we will go into the house and write," she said. "I've been thinking out those two letters; the one you are to give me for St. John, and the one I'm to give you—to use as you wish."

THE LETTERS

HE two figures moving side by side toward the house looked very charming together; and an artist might have painted the woman in black and the girl in white, calling his picture "Confidences," or "Friendship." He would have believed that he had divined the true spirit of the pretty partnership; and even had he been near enough to catch the expression of the faces, he would have seen nothing to disturb his pleasant theory.

Dolores took Lady Desmond upstairs to a sitting room which she used as her own. Frances came there sometimes, but she was not likely to come this morning. She had guests staying in the house, and when they chose to appear she would sit with them in one of the drawing-rooms, or on the west terrace, till time for luncheon.

The girl expected Lady Desmond to ask for the letter to St. John before she put into writing the statement she had promised; but to her surprise Nina volunteered to write first.

"Hearing that my cousin Anthony Vane-Eliot is not dead, and is in danger of being arrested," she began, "I feel it my duty to save him from so terrible a danger, even though I save him in spite of himself.

"When he confessed that he had shot and killed my sister-in-law, Elinor Vane, I did not contradict him because, in the few minutes that passed after the shooting,

before my brother Paul came into the room, he made me swear not to tell what had really taken place. At the time, it seemed to me very noble that he should sacrifice himself on the altar of his friendship for my brother, and I thought the only thing possible for me to do in the circumstances was to stand by him.

"I did not believe then that he would be condemned to death. I thought, and he must have thought, that Elinor's death would be considered a crime of passion committed in anger mad enough to pass for temporary insanity. Indeed, that was the line of the defense; and when, to everyone's astonishment he was condemned to be hanged for Elinor's murder, I dared not unsay what I had said at his bidding.

"Now, I see that I was wrong from the first. I should never have made such a promise as he asked of me; but we were cousins, and had always been great friends. If he had really died, perhaps I might have let the dead past bury its dead, and kept silence for always, though I have often repented my mistake. But now that he has been seen, alive and little changed, in his old home, where he must have come to visit the devoted mother who saved his life, there remains no longer any doubt in my mind as to what I ought to do.

"I cannot be bound by an old, worn-out promise while he is in danger of being found, arrested, and forced to suffer the shameful death he escaped nine years ago. The thing I must do is to tell everything exactly as it happened.

"It was no secret that Anthony Vane-Eliot and Elinor Vane had a boy and girl love affair while she was living with his mother at Queen's Quadrangles, and I thought it foolish that the story should be kept from my brother Paul when he came back from St. Petersburg and proposed to Elinor.

But Elinor was afraid to let him know, and Anthony gave her her way.

"I think she never loved my brother, and on his side it was more admiration than real love. On hers, the marriage was one of ambition. Soon she realized the mistake she had made, and when Paul brought her home from Russia to London she fell more deeply in love with Anthony than ever. By that time, too, Paul had begun to feel that she was a failure as a wife, and Paul could never bear failures.

"Anthony had tired of Elinor meanwhile, or else he was too loyal to my brother, his best friend, to think of her in the old way after her marriage, believing that Paul worshiped her. But Anthony never really understood Paul. Though he hadn't been told of that love story, he had guessed. He trusted Anthony fully, however, and when he had been married a year, he was too sick of Elinor's whims and moods to care what she did, if only it were nothing to bring dishonor on his name. All she could do to win Anthony back she did that season in London, and his reserve made her more anxious to have him at her feet. Paul watched, in his quiet, cynical way, while Anthony thought he suspected nothing.

"Elinor was a woman who wanted to be supreme with every man, and it nearly drove her mad to feel that she had lost power over Anthony. She could not sleep at night, and found no pleasure in anything, though rather than let herself think, she tried to find some amusement for every minute. To keep herself up through the strain, she began to take drugs; and after that she was no longer a really sane woman.

"On the night of her death, Paul had been away, and Anthony had taken Elinor and me to a ball. She flirted a

good deal with a young Roman count attached to the Italian Legation—a handsome but unscrupulous man, who had the name of boasting about his conquests. Instead of taking the dance he had with Elinor, Anthony sat it out with her, and scolded her for imprudence. I didn't hear what passed between them then, but Elinor referred to it in the carriage, going home. She did not care what she said before me, for she was past minding trifles; and when Anthony would have soothed her, she burst into hysterical sobbing.

"She was so upset that he was obliged to come into the house with us, though he had meant to leave us at the door. He and I together got Elinor into the library, without waking any of the servants, whom she had told not to sit up. She was still crying, but controlled herself enough to say that she wished me to leave the room: she wanted to talk to Anthony alone.

"I would have obeyed, but Anthony wouldn't let me go. He insisted that I should stay, and said to Elinor—who was furious—that it was for her sake and Paul's. That she was not herself, and that if she were, she would realize that he mustn't stop with her alone, at three o'clock at night, when her husband was away from home. There would be no harm, of course, but he thought one of the footmen was inclined to spy, and he would not allow her to run risks for him.

"Then she sobbed: 'If you loved me you wouldn't think of such stupid things,' and he answered that he did love her as his cousin and Paul's wife too dearly to do her harm. He wanted to go, and leave me to take care of her, after he had said to me that she was not responsible in such a mood for her words or acts. But she ran and locked the door, and threw the key out of the shut window, breaking the glass.

"Then, suddenly, she changed, and sobbed that she knew he did love her, just as he always had. It was only that he was afraid of Paul, or he would take her away, and end their misery. This made Anthony angry, and he told her very sternly that he did not care for her any more as he had when she was a girl, that she must not believe it for a moment. He hoped to calm her by his coldness, as one often can an hysterical woman, but he made a mistake with Elinor. She ran to Paul's desk, and pulling out a drawer seized a revolver which was kept there, and shot herself in the breast.

"She fell, and Anthony knelt beside her, pushing the revolver away from her side, so that it looked as if she couldn't have used it on herself.

- "'Paul mustn't know,' were the first words he said. 'It would kill him.'
 - "'What shall we do?' I asked.
- "'I will say that because I was mad, and loved her, and she would have nothing to do with me—because she flirted a little with others, and I was jealous, I shot her. And you must say the same,' he told me.
- "At first I refused, but he said that if I wouldn't promise he would kill himself too, and rather than see a second horror, after what I had just gone through, I would have promised anything.
- "A few minutes after Paul—who had come home unexpectedly—broke open the door, and the servants followed him in.
- "Elinor wasn't quite dead, and whether she meant to make Anthony appear guilty or not, she gasped out that it was his fault. After that, the part he chose to play was easy enough. And what could I do but keep my word?"

When she had written thus far, Lady Desmond read over the closely filled pages, and decided that she had nothing to change, nothing to add. The liberties she had here and there taken with the truth seemed to her to be more credible and creditable than the truth itself. So putting together the three sheets of paper which contained her statement, she handed them to Dolores.

"Read what I've written and tell me if that's what you want," she said brusquely.

Dolores read, slowly, carefully, dwelling on each sentence; and when she had finished, did not speak.

"Well?" Nina prompted her. "Why don't you say something? Now you know the whole truth."

"Yes, I know the truth, but not because you've written it all," said the girl. "I've had to read between the lines, and I think I see what is there. I see you-always youinterfering between your brother and his wife. I hear you pretending to sympathize with her against him, so that she came to confide in you at last. I hear you telling her that Anthony really loved her better than ever; that it was only his fear of Paul-his fear, never his friendship !--which made him seem cold to her. Then, at the end, I hear you, not Anthony, saying that your brother mustn't be told the truth. I hear you putting the idea into his head that, if Paul knew his wife had killed herself, because she loved another man, his heart would be broken. Just putting that idea in his head would have been enough to goad him on to the extreme self-sacrifice. But it would be a woman's thought, to begin with."

Nina pressed her lips together to hide their twitching, and forced herself to look the girl in the eyes.

"Do you want me to accuse myself of these things in writing?" she asked icily. "Because I will not."

"No, I don't want that. It would be more than I could expect," answered Dolores. "But I wanted to tell you that I knew."

"Anthony has given you his version of the story, no doubt," said Nina.

"No, he has told me nothing of the past," the girl assured her. "He has never even told his mother that he was innocent of murder: he has never explained anything to a living soul. But Lady Rosamund knew, without his telling, just as I knew."

"When a woman loves a man she believes him an angel," Nina sneered.

Dolores made no retort. She would not deny her love for Anthony Vane-Eliot, and if she had, Nina Desmond would not have believed her. But the girl had no hope of personal happiness in her love. A man who had so worshiped a woman that he had been ready to give his life and his honor to shield her reputation, could never love again. Much less, Dolores thought, could he love an ignorant, insignificant child while his heart was haunted with memories of a radiant beauty.

Dolores thought that she knew now who was the original of the portrait in the lost court. It could be no other than the dead Elinor Vane, for whose sake her lover had become a ghost. Probably he had painted the picture when Elinor was a girl, staying at Queen's Quadrangles; and afterwards, when a prisoner in the lost court, he had begged Lady Rosamund to lighten his captivity by giving him the portrait.

His wife to have it near him, in spite of all, showed clearly that Anthony had never ceased to love his dead cousin, yet there was no room in Dolores's heart for an emotion so mean as jealousy.

"Now for the letter you are to write St. John," said Nina, recovering herself. "Remember, you agreed to do it

at my dictation."

"I remember," returned Dolores. "But he has deserved better of me than to be used in this way. I would have married him if you hadn't consented to save Anthony. He should have known the truth; and yet, I think I could have made him happy. I should not like to say anything cruel to him in the letter."

"Don't be afraid that I shall be too exacting," said Nina, with a smile that was not sweet. "Sit down, and begin to write."

Dolores sat at the desk where Nina had written, and took the same pen. Then, as if on a sudden thought, she threw it aside and chose another. Neither spoke, but Lady Desmond understood.

"Dear Captain de Grey," the elder woman dictated, and Dolores's pen followed her words. "This morning I half promised to marry you. (That's true, isn't it?—Yes. You said so.) When I told you that, it was because I was very unhappy about another man, whom I really love. (You must write those words—just those, or I take back my statement, tear it in pieces, and deny having made it.)

"Now I am not quite as unhappy as I was about that other man. And I will tell you frankly, lest you think too highly of me, that I have used my half-engagement with you to forward my interests with him. This sounds mean, but it is true. And I had it in my mind to do that very thing

when I let you believe I might some day promise to marry you. If I had married you, it would only have been because there was no hope of my succeeding with some one else. (Yes -write that too!) But now I have made up my mind finally that I can never be your wife, whatever happens. And having told you all this, I beg-and believe-that you will not distress me by asking again. Also, I shall be glad if you will go away from your sister's for a time, so that I need have no fear of our meeting. By and by, it may be that I can bear to see you, but not now. And if you want to do a thing which will bring me pleasure, you will fall in love with some woman who has a heart to give you. "Yours sincerely,
"Dolores Eliot."

"It's a horrible letter!" exclaimed the girl, as she wrote her name. "I can't bear to have it go to him. He is so good -so kind."

"Did I like writing the things you forced me to write? It's time I had a hand in the game. And a letter would be of no use to me, if it left him loving you at the end. This will cure him forever."

"Yes," said Dolores. "After reading that, he can have nothing to regret in losing me. Perhaps you're right-for his sake as well as your own."

"I know that I'm right!" exclaimed Nina, impatiently. "Now address the letter and give it to me. I'll have it

sent by a messenger so that there may be no delay."

"Not yet," said Dolores. "You haven't signed your statement-oh, I don't want you to do it now. I don't know much about law; but I'm sure it ought to be signed before some legal person, and sworn to-"

"Oh, if it comes to that, it should be done before a Com-

missioner of Oaths," Nina answered, with veiled contempt. "That shall be later—"

"I won't give you my letter till it has been done."

Lady Desmond stifled her anger. She wanted the letter at once, and must have it. "Very well," she said, "ring and have your chauffeur bring your motor immediately. I'll go with you in it to Clere, to old Mr. Eastwood's office. If we're quick, we'll catch him before he gets away for his luncheon. You see—I'm quite willing to do all you ask. Then when it's done——"

"I will give you the letter, and you can send it by messenger to Captain de Grey," said Dolores, pressing the electric bell.

In less than ten minutes the car was at the door, and the woman in black and the girl in white were spinning into Clere.

If Mr. Eastwood was surprised at the business he was called upon to transact for Lady Desmond and Miss Eliot, he kept the feeling to himself, for it was a point of pride with the old gentleman that never in his life had he shown an emotion.

Nina chose to drive back with Dolores, saying that she would like to walk through the park to the duke's; but, free of the girl's supervision at last, and with the letter addressed to St. John in her hand, she called one of the new young gardeners to her.

To him she said that Miss Eliot had asked her to give him that letter, and to bid him take it to the Vicarage at once. Miss Eliot sent him five shillings, and requested that he would mention the errand to nobody.

So the young man went off smiling discreetly, and Lady

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Desmond followed at a distance. She had come on foot from Tillingbourne Court, and returning there could easily keep the gardener in sight. Then, by walking on a little further, she could watch him go in at the Vicarage gates. Not that there was any danger that he would play her false; but in such a matter she could not make too sure.

When she had seen what she wished to see, she turned back and hurried through one of the imposing stone gateways at Tillingbourne Court. Walking as briskly as she dared, she met face to face the man she had been on her way to find.

This was a guest of the Duke of Bridgewater, a somewhat famous person who had timed his coming for this morning, that he might arrive after the dance at Queen's Quadrangles, of which he had heard, and wished to hear no more. He liked the duke—this famous man—but he hated Queen's Quadrangles so intensely that when visiting at Tillingbourne Court he always turned his head away if it were necessary to pass the gates of that detested place.

Nina had known that this man was expected to-day, and he had been in her thoughts when she decided to play Dolores Eliot a last trick. She had been hurrying home to find him, and here he was, as if waiting to meet her, half way down the avenue. He had thus saved her a good quarter of an hour; and every minute was valuable now, if her plan had a chance of success. If everything she hoped for might arrange itself before Dolores could have speech with Anthony, the letter she had reluctantly written might as well be so much waste paper.

This man it was who had once been called the "hanging judge," and whose charge to the jury had come near hang-

ing Anthony Vane-Eliot. Since then he had changed somewhat, as he grew older, but he still believed Anthony guilty, and still thought he had richly deserved the punishment prevented by death.

Nina gave him her most glorious smile, and said how glad she was to see him. Then, as soon as she could, she brought the conversation round to the ball of last night.

"Don't talk of it!" exclaimed the great man. "I can't bear to think of that house, or anyone there. You know how I admired your sister-in-law, poor, beautiful Mrs. Vane; and all the circumstances which—"

"Oh, I know," broke in Nina, with soft sympathy. "And I wouldn't have spoken, only—a strange thing has happened. I feel I daren't keep it to myself. If I tell you, and you think yourself bound in duty to take any action, promise me that you'll never breathe that you had it from me. He was my cousin. But then poor Elinor was my sister-in-law."

"He!" repeated the "hanging judge," his heavy face flushing.

"Anthony Vane-Eliot. He is not dead. He was seen at the fancy dress ball last night, disguised of course, but unmistakable. I always wondered if Lady Rosamund hadn't had a hand in his death. Now, one does see her hand. Only—it wasn't death she gave him."

"You're sure of what you say?"

"Sure. He must be somewhere in the neighborhood. Or —you know there's a story of secret hiding places at Queen's Quadrangles. Lady Rosamund may be keeping him in the house for a day or two, till he can get clear away—wherever it is that he lives."

"He mustn't be allowed to go," said the famous man.

"He is an escaped murderer. Years make no difference. This is an affair for the police, and they must be notified at once; but you may rely upon me to keep your name out of the business."

"Oh, I thank you," murmured Nina. "It has been a pain to speak. Don't let me detain you. This has made me sad—and afraid. I shall be better left alone."

"He will kill himself—he will kill himself!" she whispered, when she had been taken at her word. "If only they get at him in time!"

Then her thoughts flashed to St. John de Grey, and she wondered how he had borne the blow. There was no question but he would despise Dolores. And for the rest—there was hope.

"I wish I could see what he is doing at this moment," she thought. "I wish I could read his mind toward me."

If her wish had been granted, she would have seen St. John writing a telegram, while his valet packed his luggage. She would have read in his mind no thought of her whatever, but an intention to apply for foreign service which would take him out of her reach for years. And she might have read also what was still in his heart for Dolores Eliot.

"Poor child," Lady Desmond might have heard him say to himself; "poor child, she's trying to make it easier for me to lose her, by putting her refusal in such a way. But I know she wasn't playing with me like that, I know she's true and sweet, and if she does love some other man, I hope to God he's worthy of her."

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

"HE LOVES YOU"

T was nearly two o'clock when Nina Desmond left Queen's Quadrangles, and Frances met Dolores as the girl was on her way to find Lady Rosamund. "Dearest, where are you flying to in such a hurry?" she asked gayly. "Don't you know we've been called to luncheon?"

"I don't want any luncheon," said Dolores. "Mother, dear, please make my excuses to everybody."

But Frances was not to be persuaded. She had six guests, she reminded her daughter, and after all the fatigue of last night, which had left her with a headache, she was not equal to getting through a meal without Dolores's help. Besides, the girl must eat. It was absurd to say that she didn't want luncheon.

"I have to see Lady Rosamund, and take her an important message," Dolores insisted.

"I happen to know that Lady Rosamund is busy just now," said Frances. "I wanted to see her myself, to thank her for the beautiful decorations which she designed and arranged for us last night, but she sent word by Soames, when I asked for her, about ten minutes ago, that she would be much occupied for an hour, and hoped I wouldn't mind waiting until after luncheon."

Dolores was sure this answer meant that Lady Rosamund was going to the lost court. By this time she must be there,

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and until she came back it would be useless to try and reach her. Reflecting thus, Dolores consented to help play hostess. But she could hardly wait till luncheon was over to go to Lady Rosamund's door and knock.

She suspected no further treachery from Nina. Indeed, with the signed statement she had in her possession, she did not see how a trick would be possible. But she was impatient to tell Lady Rosamund everything that had happened, to show her what Nina had written, and to ask what might safely be said to the prisoner in the lost court.

He had never told the real story of Elinor Vane's death, even to his mother. Would he be willing (now that all these years had passed, and Paul was married again) to be freed by Nina's testimony?

Dolores thought his decision would depend partly upon the part that Nina had originally played in the tragedy. If, after all, it had been Anthony's idea to keep the secret and bear the stain of guilt, perhaps he would prefer his prison to freedom. But if Nina had urged him to the course he had taken, begging him to spare Paul at any cost, then, Dolores hoped, Anthony would now think of his mother and of himself.

He had lived this hidden life, because he was bearing the burden of crime; but if the burden could be removed, Dolores saw no obstacle to his appearing once more in the world. If he did not wish to meet his old friends, he might live abroad, at peace in the thought that recognition would bring no danger.

These things were in the girl's mind, but she must know how far his mother would agree with her, before telling Anthony that his prison doors were open.

It was close upon three o'clock when she went at last to Lady Rosamund's sitting room, and her rap was timid, because she had never knocked there until now.

Instantly the door opened, and Lady Rosamund's face lighted at sight of the girl.

"I've just come from him," she said. "I was wishing for you. Soames told me when Lady Desmond went, but I knew you would have to stay with your mother and her guests. Now you will go to him?"

"First, I have something to tell you," said Dolores. And her face added that it was something of importance.

Lady Rosamund drew her into the room, which the girl had never seen before, since the first night when she and her mother came to look at the house. The glimpse she had had then showed her that it was one of the most poorly furnished at Queen's Quadrangles; and Lady Rosamund had done nothing by way of decoration, except to scatter flowers and books about.

"Have you anything to say that will disappoint or grieve me?" she asked, with a wistfulness that was pathetic after the storm of last night.

"I hope it will make you happier," Dolores answered. Then, quietly, she told as much of the scene between herself and Nina Desmond as need be known, and at the end showed the letter.

Lady Rosamund read it through eagerly, her color rising. "I knew, I always knew, in my heart!" she exclaimed, her eyes bright as if with the lost fire of youth. "Though, sometimes, I have dreamed that Nina Desmond was a murderess, and Anthony was shielding her. I'm glad it was not that. I never felt that it could be, really, for Anthony didn't

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love Nina, whereas once he dearly loved Elinor, and always worshiped Paul. Now, you have saved him."

"Have I?" asked Dolores. "Will he let himself be saved?"

"I think so. Oh, he must—for Paul has married again and forgotten Elinor. Besides, Paul didn't care for her as Anthony thought he did. Nina Desmond says, 'he watched.' If that is true, he must have suspected the truth, or something like it, and let Anthony sacrifice himself without protesting. I used to say to Anthony that perhaps Paul always guessed—but he would not believe that. Now, I think he will; and it will make all the difference. Besides, there can be another motive for him to exchange life for a living death—if you will give him that motive. If you're brave enough—if you care enough."

"I-give him a motive?" the girl faltered.

"He loves you. I'm selfish for him, yet even I would not have told you that—though I was tempted this morning—if it hadn't been for this letter, which means salvation. Nina will have to stand by her sworn statement. One can see by the way she has written, saving herself in every way, that she means to stand by it even before you took her to Mr. Eastwood. And if Anthony will tell the true story too—there can be happiness for him. But should he choose to save himself, I don't think he would speak of love to you. He wouldn't think it fair. He would say: 'She has everything before her. At best, I am a marked man.' That is why I asked if you cared enough, and were brave enough."

"You are mistaken," Dolores stammered. "He doesn't love me—in the way you mean. Only as a little friend—who

has helped him to make the hours pass."

"He told me himself that he loved you, and that was the reason he sent you away. He dared not see you, because he feared that his love would be stronger than his resolve."

"Oh!" cried Dolores, and covered her face with her hands.

"If I thought—if I dared think——"

- "I tell you, child, it is true. He did not mean you to know—but now, it's different. I can betray him without treachery. Don't you believe me? If you were older, you would have guessed why he sent you from him."
 - "But he loved his cousin enough to die for her."
- "No. It was his love for Paul, not for Elinor, that made him ready to sacrifice all. Didn't you understand that?"
 - "Partly. But I---"
- "He saw Elinor as she really was when she threw him over for Paul. That treason came near to killing his love for her—which after all was only a boy's first love. And her conduct in London killed it completely. That I know. So much he has told me."
- "Yet he keeps her picture, and I have seen him look up at it—oh, with the tenderest, most faithful light in his eyes."
 - "Her picture? He has none."
 - "The beautiful portrait on the wall of the bookroom—"
- "Why—" and Lady Rosamund laughed faintly—" that is my portrait. I knew I had changed, but I didn't realize how much."

The girl's face lit up with a new radiance. "I did think it like you," she said, "when I first saw it, but the face looked so happy. I couldn't imagine you as happy as that; so by and by I lost the feeling of the likeness. It was stupid of me. But I'm glad—glad. I couldn't bear to think he loved her still. It seemed terrible."

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- "It would be terrible. And—is it terrible that he should love you?"
- "It seems too heavenly to be true," the girl answered, looking very shy and young.
 - "You love him, too?"
- "Love him? O Lady Rosamund, I've been almost dying of love for him, for weeks. I thought perhaps he had seen, and that was why he felt it better for me not to come to him any more."
- "He loves you with a man's love, not a boy's. Such a love as few men can feel. For all these weeks you have been his world. If you are brave enough, you can make him tell you of his love, though even this letter would not induce him to speak—unless he *knew*."
 - "Unless he knew-what?"
 - "That you love him."
 - "Doesn't he guess-at all?"
- "No. He thinks too poorly of himself. He says that to you he is a ghost, or at best the hero of a fairy tale."
 - "He is everything to me."
- "If he were free, would your mother consent to your marrying him?"
- "She'd consent to anything that would make me happy," said Dolores, with joyous confidence.

And then a knock came at the door—quick, agitated; a tell-tale knock, which set the girl's heart beating. She knew that something had happened.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

THE DECISION

To is Soames," said Lady Rosamund, and opened the door. The old butler was ghastly, all his sleek decorousness of ancient-family servant slipped from him like a torn garment.

"My lady! my lady!" he gasped; and then, seeing Dolores, stopped, his gaze wild and thwarted.

"Speak before her. She is in my whole confidence," his mistress said.

"Two policemen are here, with an order to search the house for—for——"

Lady Rosamund's soft face hardened. Instantly she was strong and resourceful; and in a flash much was clear to Dolores that never had been clear before.

"Have they begun?" she asked of Soames.

"Yes, my lady. Nothing I could say would stop them. What is to become of——"

"Be quiet," said Lady Rosamund. "You need have no fear. Let them search. I will go to them now." Then, turning to Dolores: "Is this Lady Desmond's work, or has Lord Tillingbourne, who saw him last night, set the dogs on us?"

"Lady Desmond will want us to think that. But I'm sure it is she," answered Dolores.

"I believe you're right. Not that it matters, for she must stand by her statement. I will go now to these men, and I will show the letter. But you—you must run quickly

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to Anthony. Tell him what Nina Desmond has written—especially what she says about Paul. Then—if you are brave, as I said—you can make him save himself. You can do far more with him than I can, because of what I told you. Go now into the priest's wardrobe and lock the door on the inside. On the east wall are hooks for hanging clothes. Turn the third one to the left downward, as if it were a door handle, and a narrow piece of the wainscoting will open as it does in the corridor. When you have opened it, unlock the outside door, that the men may suspect nothing if they come that way, and slide the panel shut behind you. You'll find that easy. For the rest—you know what to do: and God be with you in doing it."

Dolores flew to the door, and looked out, up the length of the long gallery. No one was in sight, and she darted across to the door of the priest's wardrobe. Safe on the other side, she obeyed Lady Rosamund's instructions; and three minutes later found herself in the passage that connected the lost court with the secret opening at the end of the gallery.

Dark as it was she knew it must be the same, and groping, found her way to the door of the hidden room, where she had spent so many happy hours; the room of the Spanish pictures and brocades.

Very lightly she tapped, but almost immediately the door was opened, and against the light which struck at her eyes she saw Anthony's tall figure silhouetted darkly.

- "You!" he exclaimed. "I thought it must be-"
- "Lady Rosamund sent me," the girl broke in to explain. And then, without waiting, she plunged into the story she had to tell.
 - "Before this, the men who've come to search have seen 345

Lady Desmond's letter," she went on, breathlessly, at the end. "So you see, you must speak now. It would do no one any good if you did not, for the truth will be known, and talked about everywhere. People will say they always guessed. Oh, don't look so grave and doubtful. Be happy. Think of your mother. Think of——"

"I'm thinking of Paul, too," said Anthony. "What matter if he isn't all I once believed him? How can I take from him his title and the place that he inherited? Better if I died now."

"If you did, you would break your mother's heart, and—kill me. Anthony, I love you—I love you so."

Suddenly the cloud of gloom and doubt was lifted from his face. His eyes were filled with light.

"My darling!" he said, as if in a dream, and she ran to him. Then he would have been more or less than man if, loving her with all his soul, he had not caught her in his arms and held her close.

For a moment they forgot everything except each other. And it was Dolores who remembered first that there was a world outside the lost court.

- "Your cousin Paul is happy, and very rich. Will you live—for me?" she whispered.
- "I will," he answered. "For you, and for such a love as I think no man ever knew."
- "Then come out with me, into the light," the girl said, putting her hand in his.

And Anthony came. He knew that there would be much to endure, and a great ordeal to face. But with Dolores, life was worth fighting for, and he thought the end was sure.

THE END







